THE RED DRAGON

China of to-day is vividly pictured in this swiftly flowing story of love, intrigue, and exciting adventure amid the chaos of Revolution.

LEWIS STANTON FALEN

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THE RED DRAGON

By Lewis Stanton Palen

STEPHEN BROOKS, a young attaché at the American Consulate in Canton, learns of a strange and powerful society, the Taian or League of Peace. Through a daring expedition to its most secret of councils, he learns that back of the Taian stand the Reds of Russia. Unfortunately, Brooks has fallen in love with a young Russian girl, whom he later discovers to be his principal political enemy. The story of Brooks's battle against hidden forces and of his love makes a book which holds its reader fascinated.

Its Oriental atmosphere, its understanding of the Chinese, and its authentic rendering of the crises through which China is passing, at once put it out of the class of the commonplace novel and into that of the adventure story par excellence.

THE RED DRAGON

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THE RED DRAGON

THE RED DRAGON

A China Story of To-Day

BY

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

Author of 'The White Devil of the Black Sea,' 'The Lost Sword of Shamyl,' and 'The White Devil's Mate'

Collaborator with Ferdinand Ossendowski in 'Beasts, Men and Gods,' etc.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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NOTE

WITH a year and more of bitter civil war behind the present situation in China, colored not a little by Red activities, it is interesting to record that this narrative of war and high governmental intrigue was first written more than four years ago. Its original author is a friend of mine whose post during several years of service under the Chinese Government and whose present position of political influence have rendered it inadvisable, from his viewpoint, to give out the story under his own name. His grasp of the situation, and his almost prophetic guess as to the inevitable clash of the various factors which were moiling in the early part of the present decade, very definitely impressed me with the fact that Western readers might take not only an hour of diversion from its pages but also a clearer idea of China's tragic complexity. Therefore I asked and received the author's permission to expand and develop his text for submission to a wider Occidental public than he was reaching. It may perhaps be well to indicate here that there has been no attempt to follow history in any particular. All of the characters are purely imaginary; in no case have real persons or definite issues been masked under imaginary names or settings.

Nearly a half more has been added to the original author's work, and all of it has been re-

written and adapted to the changed setting. It remains true, however, that the credit for practically the entire framework, as well as the basic plot and most of the Chinese atmosphere, belongs unreservedly to him. On the other hand, by a fortunate circumstance, I was enabled to enlist the assistance of Mr. Stewart Beach in rearranging and supplementing our original material. To him, in turn, is due the credit for the major portion of the additional text.

It would seem, consequently, that my own contact with the manuscript has been little more than that of editor-in-chief, and I am perfectly content to leave it thus, if the reader, on his part, will accept this my apology for having offered him a story under my own name which appears to be largely the work of two other individuals.

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

JUAN-LES-PINS, A.M., FRANCE
July 15, 1927

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THE RED DRAGON

CHAPTER I

INTO THE UNKNOWN

THE fingers of Consul-General Whitehead beat a nervous tattoo on the edge of his desk as he essayed the precarious passage of a cigar from the right to the left corner of his mouth. His eyes were staring far out across the muddle of tiny sampans and junks which crowded the waterfront of Canton below Shameen. But his thoughts were fixed upon the beautifully inscribed Chinese characters in three letters which a younger man, also an American, who was opposite him at the desk, held in his hand. The younger man sat quietly, also deep in thought, waiting for his chief to speak. Finally he was rewarded.

'I don't like it, Brooke, my boy; I don't like it,' muttered Whitehead without altering his gaze. 'I've felt a real revolution coming on in China ever since old Yuan Shih-kai passed out of the picture. It's in the air. These constant river piracies aren't all chance affairs, you know. They mean something — something serious. And these letters from your friend Li Hang-po urging you to come to Kueilin may give us a lead to work on. What is it he says? "Something unusually im-

portant to you and to China." That means only one thing, Brooke, that the counter-revolutionary crowd have some big plan on foot that we don't want to miss.'

'Then you would really like to see me go to Kueilin, sir?' questioned Brooke, leaning forward, a trace of eagerness in his tone.

'Yes, I should,' said Whitehead, turning to face his young subaltern. 'Damn it, Brooke, I hate to send you into danger. Lord knows, you get into enough of it on your own account; but this seems important. Who knows? It may give us the key to this whole TAIAN movement which I'll bet a hat is connected with the river piracies in some way or other. "Taian" — "the Great Peace" — you say the word means. Do you know what I think it means?' Whitehead raised his fist to emphasize the revelation:

'It means, Brooke, that the Russians are mixed up in this business somehow or other, and that they want to paint the poor old Chinese dragon red.' The fist descended upon the desk with such force that the ink-wells rattled.

Stephen Brooke gazed thoughtfully at his chief. 'If your guess is correct,' he said slowly, 'then any investigating we do must be handled with the greatest care. If Russia is mixed up in the game, there are bound to be international complications, and we'll have to keep Washington out of it.' He rose slowly, his mind rapidly playing with his plan of campaign.

'There's a boat to Wuchow in the morning, sir,' he said. 'I'll catch that and find a junk to

carry me up the Fu to Kueilin. That will land me there in plenty of time.'

'H'm,' said Whitehead. 'When did Li Hang-po say he wanted you?'

'By the fifteenth day of the fifth moon,' Brooke replied.

'Oh, confound the Chinese calendar!' broke in Whitehead. 'When is that in English? I never can keep track of the days in this country by their silly system of reckoning.'

Brooke smiled. 'It happens to be June 5th this year,' he said. 'I've plenty of time, but there's no use taking a chance. I'll leave to-morrow.'

Whitehead was silent, his gaze occupied again with the junks off Shameen, and Brooke, surmising that the interview was at an end, crossed the hall to his own quarters, his mind already busy with the new adventure, which seemed to assume such an important aspect. Queer, he thought, as he sat down at his desk, how the young Chinese, whose life he had saved months before, should have come back into his world again. He remembered their parting well — Li Hang-po, standing so gravely before him and reciting grimly but with the customary mysteriousness of the Chinese:

'Clouds gather silently behind hidden clouds. China hears now but the rumblings of the great storm that may soon break forth in all its fury. Some of us have pledged ourselves to resist the storm. You, Your Excellency, might some day be of great import in this struggle.'

'I?' Brooke had queried. 'Tell me what it's all about. You speak in riddles.'

'Boats are held up on the river, some here, some there, but always by the same hand — a hand which is but the symbol of many hands. And this hand of many hands will stretch out one day, until all China shall feel it at its throat. Do you follow me, Your Excellency?'

'You mean the secret societies?' Brooke questioned. The Chinese held up a finger for silence.

'Some day you may know, if you care to. You like China?'

'Of course I do,' Brooke replied enthusiastically. 'I love China, and have a kindly feeling for all your people, Li Hsien-shêng.'

'Then you shall one day know,' the Chinese promised as he turned away, leaving the young American to ponder the import of their curious conversation, whose significance was just now beginning to dawn upon him. China and the secret societies! Vague rumors of the machinations of these bodies had crept about Canton for the past year, Brooke recalled, and even if they were too vague to admit of any definite impression, they were still too persistent to be discarded. Yes, it must be the secret societies about which Li Hang-po warned him. The American smiled grimly. Here might be the beginnings of something which would stretch out across the vast reaches of China into Europe. And he was to be let into the secret of it — perhaps to have a hand in stopping that revolution which Whitehead felt sure would come. He put the thought of his adventure out of his mind with something like a sigh and turned to the papers on his desk. Better

have everything in order, he mused. No telling when he would return.

'You are His Excellency Brooke?' The note of certainty in the challenge, which might have been natural enough in Canton, where the tall young interpreter of the American Consulate was a familiar figure, was sufficiently unexpected in Wuchow to bring him round with a start to face his Chinese interlocutor. They stood almost alone, save for the sweating coolies who were unloading the steamer which had just brought the American up the West River from Canton. The crowd that came out of the gang-port had rapidly melted into the early morning bustle of Wuchow's busy river-front during the few moments Brooke stood uncertainly trying to remember which was the road leading to Consulate Hill.

A glance into the inscrutable face of the middle-aged Chinese, assisted by the intuition which Brooke had gained during his five odd years in China, reassured him.

'Yes, I am Brooke,' he answered briefly, 'but I have not yet received your honorable name.'

'Li Hang-po sent word to me to arrange for your journey up the Fu to Kueilin,' the Chinese replied, after giving his name. 'I have a boat and crew waiting. Is Your Excellency ready to start immediately?'

The American smiled. The matter-of-fact manner in which the Chinese had carried out his mission was quite equal to the best brand of the mysterious in the Oriental which had always

fascinated him. Half a dozen foreigners had debarked from the Canton steamer, he reflected, yet this Chinese, with unfailing accuracy, had picked him from the others as his man. An American or an Englishman would have remarked upon it. To the Chinese it was the most natural thing in the world. Brooke, understanding this, realized that any comment upon the matter would be entirely lost upon the emissary of Li Hang-po. He picked up the suit-case which contained his scanty traveling equipment for this unusual voyage and asked simply: 'Where is the boat?'

The man only turned and led the way. It would take a Chinese to do the thing so gracefully in silence, Brooke mused, as he followed his guide. If there be no need for speech, then why make the effort? seemed to be the philosophy of this inscrutable race. The silence lent, however, only an added gravity to the conduct of his companion. Something was evidently awaiting him at Kueilin, whose full significance he had not yet caught. He only knew that it was certainly some really serious business which was the underlying motive of this arduous trip to the home of the man whose life he had saved.

'Did Li Hang-po send any message for me?' he questioned, as they trudged along together.

'None,' replied the Chinese laconically. 'He ordered me to secure a boat and a trustworthy crew. That was all.'

'You know Li Hang-po?' Brooke pursued.

'I have never had that honor. I am but a lowly servant in the Cause.'

'Cause?' repeated Brooke curiously. 'There is an organization, then?'

The Chinese merely pressed his lips together. Brooke, watching his face closely, realized that he had said more than he intended. But the question seemed to require an answer.

'You will learn at Kueilin,' he said. 'I cannot tell you more. I had understood that you already knew. Since you do not, then Li Hang-po will tell you; otherwise he would not have summoned you for the fifteenth day of the fifth moon.'

Brooke started slightly at the phrase. It was one which each of Li Hang-po's letters had contained — an adjuration that he should be in Kueilin before that day of the old-fashioned Chinese calendar. That his companion would not tell him more, he felt sure; yet curiosity almost got the better of him. Stifling further questions as useless, he walked along in silence until the Chinese suddenly turned sharply down to the water-front again, where a comfortable, two-cabin boat lay moored. An ancient Kueilinese, whose discolored and broken teeth were the distinguishing marks of a grizzled, weather-beaten countenance, was introduced to the American as the *laodah* of the clumsy craft. Brooke hesitated for just a moment, as a member of the crew seized his bag and carried it into one of the cabins. In this time of uncertainty, when piracies on the rivers were the rule rather than the exception, he felt that he was taking no more precaution than he might in boarding the Hudson River night boat. But the momentary doubt vanished

with the last word of earnest counsel from the Chinese, who seemed to understand his thought.

'You need have no fear of your boat and its crew,' he said. 'They have been tried, and we know them to be trustworthy. They will carry you to Kueilin in perfect ease and comfort.' And with that the strange guide made a low bow to the foreign guest, backed away a few steps, turned swiftly up the bund, and disappeared out of Brooke's life as abruptly as he had come into it, leaving the young American strangely alone, to watch the crew cast off and head out upon the long journey up the Fu to Kueilin.

CHAPTER II

UNUSUAL TRAVELING COMPANIONS

THREE days later Brooke stood leaning against the cabin of his junk, watching, with the keen admiration of one who knows the black waters, the craftsmanship of the old Kueilinese, whose clever handling of the boat, aided by the almost superhuman efforts of his willing crew, was slowly but surely winning headway against the turbulent current of the stream. The going had been easy enough until they passed the prosperous, forest-girt village of Tao Shui, above which the stream became more and more boisterous, with a rapid every *li* or two, until finally they entered the first long, unbroken succession of nasty, swirling water at Hsin Tsai T'an, through which the junk had to be dragged and guided with consummate care and skill.

Brooke smiled as the captain told him that here he should have the first sight of what his *foki* could really do, and watched with interest as the crew, responding with alacrity to the orders of their grizzled captain, took up their stations in preparation for the combat with such a worthy enemy as old Hsin Tsai T'an. The young American's eyes were riveted on the converging walls and the broad reef of boulders in the stream along the right bank, which narrowed the channel to little more than twice the width of the seemingly

flimsy craft that stood alone between him and that raging torrent. Out on the narrow trekking path along the face of the cliff half of the crew were leaning almost prone against the wooden strips that crossed their breasts and carried the individual ropes by which each was attached to the main tow-line that ran out from the top of the mast. The other half of the men had taken their places on the poling planks along the gunwale.

Brooke could not but marvel at the strength which these light-framed men were able to exert against the mighty current. Over it all their incessant trekking chant flung an overtone as wild and rugged as the rocky walls above them. But if the men on the poling planks were toiling, those on the shore seemed to be carrying a giant's task. Brooke caught his breath when his fascinated glance finally turned from the bronzed bodies of the polers up to their companions at the end of the straining line. The trekking path was ridiculously narrow and ran along at a giddy height, where one false step, one slip of the foot, might mean instant death, not only to the careless one, but to all his mates. He watched ever in the same spell of fascination as the men toiled on without a second's relaxation. Making the mast bow slightly in recognition of their prowess, they were winning their way literally inch by inch, like their comrades on board, while their own weird chant joined with that from below to phrase a strange, symphonic melody which made the gorge and the forests on the ledges above it seem pregnant with sound.

Toiling, fighting, shouting, the crew finally won its way through the last reach of the rapids and, with the conquered monster behind them, halted to rest from their labors. Brooke spoke enthusiastically to the captain of the magnificent spectacle he had witnessed and then, filling his pipe, went forward to the bow and fell to musing over the strange concatenation of events that had brought him into this eery, fable-ridden region. His mind turned again to the scene in the gambling den that evening when he had been out looking for some of the underlying color of the characteristic life of Canton. The game itself was monotonous and failed entirely to hold his interest, though he never wearied of studying the expressions of the motley group of sedan-chair coolies, porters, sailors, house-boys, and clerks that was regularly lured into the fantan-den by the insatiable penchant of the Chinese for gambling.

As he watched the eager faces, he noticed one young man whose clothes and manners clearly marked him as of unquestionably better class. At first fortune favored him, so that small coins and even dollars accumulated before him. Then came the gambler's usual tragic reversal of luck. When the pile of silver coins had dwindled to a few coppers and then to nothing, the young aristocrat of this clientèle slipped away from the table without a sign of emotion expressed on his face and disappeared into the street. This would naturally have marked the end of the episode for his observer were it not that, in a very

short time, he was back, but without the rich over-garment which had first attracted Brooke's attention.

The interlude failed to change his luck. Watch, rings, and all the superfluous trinkets which the young Chinese happened to have disappeared down the same road to the pawnshop which the silk coat had taken. When everything had been staked and lost, the youth rose quietly from his place, with the same inscrutable expression, and made for the door. But this time something in his hand caught Brooke's eye and drew him after the boy into the street, just in time to see the lad swallow the contents of a small vial. Snatching him up without ceremony, he forced him into a rickshaw and hurried him off to his quarters at the Consulate in time to administer a powerful emetic that robbed the dose of opium of its prey. Then followed the redemption of his pawned articles and the dispatch home to the parent whom Li Hang-po had felt he would not be able to face after his gaming losses.

Although the boy and his father had both at once written to return to him the funds he had expended on the lad's rehabilitation and to thank him with all the grace and sincerity of the Chinese language, it was months later that the first of the three letters urging his trip to Kueilin had come to him.

'Strange,' Brooke muttered as he put his pipe back into his pocket and rose, 'what unexpected results can come from so trivial an incident.'

With all his absorption in the customs and ways

of men, the beauties of nature exerted an almost mystic spell over Stephen Brooke. His interest had never been a scientific one, so far from it, in fact, that he was constantly at a loss to recall the names of even some of the most familiar wild and garden flowers; yet the majestic silence of a forest or the swiftness of a rushing stream never failed to set in vibration chords of admiration and enthusiasm.

The scenery along the Fu offered constant incentive for the imagination to plunge itself deep into the beauties of ever-changing, wild, and romantic nature pictures. Half from a desire to touch the reality of his unusual background, and half to relieve the monotony of the journey, Brooke slipped over the side and made his way upon jutting rocks to the shore. Free from all thoughts save those inspired by the welcome surroundings, he trudged happily along the rocky tow-path until he emerged from the shelter of a forest to a high promontory, round which the river wound in a sharp curve, and slipped lazily down upon a bed of soft moss, where he drew from his pocket a copy of the 'Liao Chai' and was soon absorbed in one of its ghost stories which seemed peculiarly well adapted to the wild, romantic region about him.

He had not progressed very far with his reading when his attention was distracted by faint sounds in the distance. At first he paid no heed to them, merely thinking that his own crew had resumed its march. Then, as he turned a page and stopped to listen for a moment, he realized that the cries

came from the opposite direction. Stories of river pirates, thrown into higher relief by the fiction in which his mind had been engrossed, flashed through his thoughts as he jumped to his feet. He thrust the book back into his pocket and, stopping only long enough to inspect the automatic which Whitehead's warnings had induced him to carry, started off at a trot, making as fast time as the narrowness of the tow-path and the bad footing would permit.

The shouting grew more distinct as he progressed, until, when he rounded another of the rocky promontories, he burst full upon the cause of it all. Just where the river swirled in a fierce rapid around the foot of a rocky cliff he saw a house-boat, listing badly, with some of the crew screaming and gesticulating on the bank, toward which they were attempting to drag the apparently wrecked craft.

Taking in the situation at a glance, Brooke hurried forward. A sailor explained briefly what had happened. The rudder had broken in the rapids, allowing the boat to drift helplessly against a rock, which stove a hole in her planks and let the water pour in. In answer to Brooke's inquiry as to who the passengers were, the sailor explained in a flood of Chinese that there were two foreigners, an old man and a lady, besides a Chinese gentleman.

Brooke had already stripped off his coat and now threw his weight on the line. If it were in general a humanitarian duty to save, it was doubly so in the foreigner's code in China if there

were others of his kind in danger. A swift survey showed him that the passengers were in no immediate peril of their lives, as the boat had passed through the vicious rapids which had been her undoing and was now grounded in the shallow water in a much less turbulent eddy. Once the junk was hauled out of danger, the problem seemed simply to be the transfer of the passengers with their luggage to the shore as speedily as possible. While he had been directing the still-excited members of the crew in their effort to handle the tow-lines in such a way that they would exert the greatest force, he had been surprised by the appearance of a girl at the companionway of the wrecked craft. Perhaps it was the unusual setting for the picture, perhaps it was something in the subject itself; in any case Brooke was surprised and a bit irritated to have waked to the fact that he had stopped in the middle of a sentence to the crew and was standing gazing at her. Again, perhaps it was the irritation, perhaps it was the dramatic appeal of the situation that had spurred him on to redouble the efforts of the men on the lines to bring the boat beyond the greedy fingers of the swirling current.

After the girl had turned back into the cabin, ten minutes of further tugging brought the badly listed boat to a somewhat more upright position and to a point from which the passengers might easily be brought ashore. This done, Brooke made his way aboard. Apparently the girl had been watching his approach, for, as he climbed up on the narrow deck, she opened the door and stepped out.

'I hardly know how to thank you,' she said in perfect English, with the slightest suggestion of an accent whose origin puzzled Brooke until she introduced herself. 'Our crew lost their heads and were so excited that I feared we should never reach the shore, and the whole affair has frightened my poor father terribly.'

'I'm extremely sorry,' murmured Brooke, slightly embarrassed by the perfect composure and poise of the girl before him, whom he had already judged, in his first glance at her, to be not more than twenty.

'But it is all safely over now, thanks to your miraculous appearance,' she replied; then added almost abruptly: 'I am Alexandra Goluboff.'

'My name is Stephen Brooke,' returned the American, bowing and cursing inwardly the perfect simplicity of the girl, which made him feel so ill at ease. However, if she noticed it, she gave no sign and, holding the door open for him, said:

'Please come inside.'

Brooke followed her into the cabin and was shocked at the first sight of the object to which the girl introduced him. With the daughter so pleasing, he was unprepared for this grinning idiot whom she presented as her father. He had an over-large head with a face pitted by smallpox, and with a skin of a pallid, yellow hue. Hollow cheeks, a flat nose and a big mouth, set in a bristly mustache and beard, went to make up the revolting countenance that surmounted a lean, short, twisted body. But it was left for his eyes to contribute the most unpleasant element of his

whole appearance. As Brooke stepped forward to acknowledge the introduction, the man giggled in such a stupid way that he caught himself involuntarily jerking back his outstretched hand with an instinctive feeling of loathing; for the expression of the eyes suggested to him a horse about to bite. With an effort, Brooke forced a smile of greeting and, finding that old Goluboff spoke no more English than he did Russian, reflected with a feeling of relief that there would be no direct conversation between them.

With this unpleasant presentation hardly over, the girl turned to make known the third member of their party, Dr. Ma, who briefly explained, as he shook hands in the European fashion, that he was from Singapore, and who seemed much more urbane than Brooke himself. But for certain slightly distinctive elements in his finely featured face, one might have taken him for a European of some indeterminate ancestry. Yet to Brooke, who was thoroughly acquainted with the local characteristics of the different provinces, his build, delicate, yet strong, together with the lines of his face, announced him as being from Kwangtung. He spoke perfect English and later admitted, in answer to Brooke's queries regarding his speech, that he had taken his degree at Cambridge.

With the introductions over, the next step was the transport of passengers and luggage to the shore.

'Fortunately,' explained Alexandra Goluboff, who appeared to be the real leader of the party,

'we have brought little with us, so that the moving of our belongings will cause no great trouble.'

The real difficulty arose in persuading the girl's father to attempt the passage over the slippery rocks to the shore. With the party all out on deck, the old man finally balked, shaking his big head and muttering in a sort of gibberish, which the girl nevertheless seemed to understand, his refusal to leave the boat.

'I'm afraid there is no other way but for you to carry him, Mr. Brooke,' the girl said anxiously. 'He doesn't think he can keep his footing on the rocks and he is deathly afraid of water. He is not very strong, you see, and is quite uncertain in his steps.'

'No trouble at all,' Brooke replied, with a reassuring smile; 'that is, if you think he will trust himself to me.'

While the girl spoke a few words to her father, the American watched rather pityingly her efforts to persuade the mentally deficient man to overcome his fear. The interlude gave him an excellent opportunity to observe the girl's singular beauty. He decided again that she could hardly be over twenty and he found himself watching the high lights of the sun playing in the lustrous, dark hair that bound her well-shaped head in a heavy plait. Clear, deep-blue eyes gave wonderful life and spirit to the well-bred face with the straight, fine nose and clear-cut, energetic chin, and her whole expression breathed youthful freshness and a spirit of enterprise. She was but a girl, there was no mistaking it; but about the lines of her mouth

there were traces of a determination which only sadness could have furrowed.

They made an extraordinary picture, standing there on the deck of the house-boat — this girl, so apparently born for beauty and laughter, into whose life sadness had crept, and the distorted, cringing old man who was her father. Brooke shook his head in pity at the sight.

'Cause enough in such a parent,' he reflected, 'to bring ineffable sorrow into the life of the daughter.'

Dr. Ma had taken the opportunity afforded by the consultation to arrange his effects and shortly appeared to announce that he had taken the liberty of packing old Goluboff's as well. The girl thanked him briefly and then turned to Brooke to report to him that her father had finally consented to being carried ashore. Before he had time to change his mind, the tall American picked him up and bore him, as though he were a child, over the treacherous, slippery rocks to the bank, where he deposited him on a grassy slope with a feeling of sincere relief at having him out of his arms. Turning back to assist the daughter over the tortuous way, he discovered her already stepping with agile grace from rock to rock and watched her come safely ashore to hurry to the old man and assure herself that he was all right. Brooke then turned his attention to the crew and arranged for the transport of the few pieces of luggage.

When everything had been deposited beside the stranded party on the bank, the American decided to make one more survey of the wrecked

house-boat to be sure that nothing had been forgotten. Miss Goluboff and Dr. Ma were apparently orderly persons; for the place was clear, and they had left nothing. In one corner of the cabin, however, Brooke noticed a slip of red paper on which some Chinese characters were written. Absent-mindedly he tucked it into his pocket and made his way back to the shore.

On the bank he found the travelers just awakening to the evident seriousness of their position. Dr. Ma and the girl were conversing earnestly and, when he approached, they placed their predicament before him.

'We cannot thank you enough for all you have done for us, Mr. Brooke,' said the girl. 'Without your assistance, our stupid crew might have let the boat break away from the shallow water and drift back into the current, when we should all have been lost. We are deeply grateful to you for saving our lives. Almost miraculously,' she went on, overriding Brooke's attempt to protest, 'you have rescued us — but what next? We are set down in a country of which none of us, not even Dr. Ma, though he is a Chinese, knows anything. What are we to do?'

'I was just going to speak to you about that,' Brooke answered, as he seated himself beside them on the bank. 'Listen!' He held up his hand for silence. From far down the Fu floated up the droning trekking-chant of his boatmen. As they caught the sounds, he announced with a mock bow and a grand gesture:

'The fairy prince who has saved you brings his

magic steeds to carry you safely to your destination.'

To their bewildered look he gave answer with a laugh:

'Hasn't it occurred to you that I must have had some means of transportation in order to be in this vicinity myself? No one comes here on foot, you know. The "fairy steeds" you will find to be a crew of excellent Kueilinese, dragging a two-cabin house-boat. If you won't object to the inconvenience, you and your father can occupy the spare cabin and Dr. Ma can share mine.'

'You are a fairy prince indeed,' laughed the girl, 'though I really don't understand why one man should have a two-cabin boat.'

'Nor I,' returned Brooke, 'and to tell the truth, I had been rather cursing my boss, who made arrangements for the trip in Wuchow, for encumbering me with the clumsy affair. It was a mistake, of course; but a very fortunate one, as it turns out, doubly so since it will relieve the monotony of the journey for me and will enable you to continue yours almost unbroken.'

Brooke caught himself as he said 'my boss.' He could hardly account for the sudden caution which had prompted him to use this subterfuge to give his appearance on the Fu the character of a business trip. It was but the first of a series of evasions which he later found himself making in spite of his confirmed habit of unquestioned frankness. But he was left little time for reflection. The pleasure which both Dr. Ma and the girl evinced in the arrangements that seemed so

providentially made for continuing their journey and their effusions of gratitude almost embarrassed him. To save himself from blushing at the tributes which both showered upon him, he hastily continued his explanation:

'The stupid boat that was hired for me in Wuchow is quite too cumbersome for proper travel on the Fu, and I can usually walk much faster than the crew can trek and pole it. So, when the sheer monotony of it begins to pall, I foot it for a bit along the shore. That's what I was doing when I heard the cries of your crew after your junk went against the rocks. You can see for yourselves how slow the fellows are. It must be all of an hour since I left them, and they haven't come up yet.'

The girl's face clouded for a moment.

'Oh, do you think we shall be there in time?' she questioned, turning to Dr. Ma.

'Have no fear, Miss Goluboff,' said the Chinese reassuringly, 'we have allowed ourselves plenty of time to reach Kueilin with the slowest going. Miss Goluboff and her father have business to attend to,' he explained easily, turning to Brooke. 'They must be in Kueilin by a certain time or they will lose the title to properties in Russia which are held tentatively by persons residing there.'

'But I thought that under the Reds ——' began Brooke.

'Quite so,' the Chinese interrupted, 'quite so. You thought that there were no property owners in Russia now, did you not?'

'Why, yes,' said Brooke, 'I thought that the Soviets did away with all that.'

'And so they did,' began Dr. Ma, in a smooth, reassuring manner which made the American instantly suspicious.

Just then the girl interposed.

'Dr. Ma has misunderstood,' she said, looking squarely into Brooke's eyes with an appeal which he did not fail to see. 'Our business is of a private character which I may not reveal to any one. I am sure that you will understand.'

'Of course,' replied Brooke simply, while Ma shrugged his shoulders non-committally.

'I thought it might be easier so,' observed the Chinese, as he arose and strolled down the river in the direction from which the shouts of the crew were becoming more distinct each moment.

'I am sorry to have placed him in an awkward position,' said Alexandra Goluboff when he was out of hearing. 'He has traveled with us from Singapore and has done so much for us. Without him, I hardly know how we should have made our way through China, as we had no knowledge of the language.'

'It is nothing,' responded Brooke, dismissing the matter with a laugh. 'It only shows that Ma is truly Oriental, going a mile where a yard might easily have sufficed.'

'I know,' said the girl, 'but please don't hold it against him. He only wished to relieve me from embarrassment.'

'Of course,' agreed Brooke, and the matter was dropped.

A shout from the object of their conversation announced that Brooke's crew had rounded the

promontory just below the one against which the Goluboffs' craft had so unfortunately foundered; and Brooke asked permission to send their crew, which was resting on the bank, to the assistance of his own men, who were straining every ounce of their power to drag the heavy junk against the boiling current in the narrows. With these reënforcements in the line, the shouting drew rapidly nearer; and in a few moments the concerted efforts of the two crews brought the boat to the shore just above the travelers.

Brooke had left the extra cabin quite untouched during his sojourn on the craft, so that there was nothing to be done in preparation other than to transfer the luggage from the bank before the party was once more ready to embark. Again the girl had difficulty in inducing her father to move; but, with this finally accomplished, and the old man safely located in the spare cabin, the travelers were ready to leave the place of their recent misfortune. Brooke spoke a word to the *laodah*, at which that ancient Kueilinese, grinning his two rows of discolored teeth into unabashed prominence, gave a signal to his now-augmented crew that started the craft once more moving slowly on up the river.

The period of adjustment to the new conditions was a short one. Brooke found Dr. Ma a thoroughly congenial cabin-mate, meticulously clean with regard to his personal effects and scrupulously neat. His greatest anxiety seemed to be to cause his benefactor the least trouble possible. He spoke little and, though Brooke felt a slight

resentment toward him for having assumed what he considered to be too great a presumption with regard to Alexandra Goluboff, he was always courteous and showed no feeling over Brooke's attitude. Alexandra herself was charming in both appearance and manner. After she had stowed away their effects and had assured herself that her father was comfortably settled, she appeared on deck to chat with Brooke, who had left Dr. Ma to arrange his luggage in their narrow quarters and had come on deck to smoke.

'Did you find everything all right?' he questioned, as he rose to greet her and offer her a seat beside his own.

'Oh, yes, indeed,' returned the girl enthusiastically. 'Your — your employer must have anticipated that you would have visitors, for there is everything necessary in the spare cabin. And father finds the change quite to his satisfaction.'

'I'm very glad,' said Brooke.

'I don't know what we should have done if you had not turned up, Mr. Brooke,' she said with a grateful tone in her voice, which made him thrill just a little in spite of his inward curse for allowing himself to be affected by a strange Russian girl — and that with an idiot for a father. It must have been the unusual surroundings that had upset his balance.

'Oh, you'd have been picked up by some one,' said Brooke easily, 'there are plenty of people traveling up to Kueilin at this season of the year. It is dangerous, though, with all the pirates there are along the river.'

'You are going on business, I think you said?'

'Why, yes,' answered Brooke, excusing his deception by telling himself that it *was* a sort of business on which he had set out.

'H'm,' mused Alexandra, 'there are so many young men in business here in China, it seems. Tell me, what do you do, all of you who are so far from your homes?'

Brooke looked at her sharply. But she was gazing out to where the dying sun was reddening the tops of the distant hills, apparently oblivious to her question's possible significance. He waited a moment before committing himself.

'Oh, all sorts of things,' he said, when his answer finally came. 'Most of the young chaps in China are in the export and import trade. They come here for a great variety of reasons. Some of them hate it — a few of them love it.'

'And you?' encouraged the girl, convoying her question with one of her rare smiles, so disarming, so evidently frank, that it made one forget the lines of sadness about her mouth.

'Need you ask?' queried Brooke. 'I love it, every bit of it. The Orientals fascinate me. They are such strange anomalies. Take your Dr. Ma, for example, and that incident on the shore. Ma has apparently lived away from China most of his life. In fact, he told me that he had been sent out of the country when he was ten to study in England and take his degree there. Yet he is Chinese to the core and he can never overcome it. Why? I don't know. It's the ancestors, I suppose — atavism. Born in him and, even if he lives outside

the country all the rest of his life, he will never get away from it.'

'And we Russians — do you like us, too?'

'Now that's hardly fair, Miss Goluboff,' returned Brooke with a smile. 'In the first place I really don't know a thing about Russia. I've never been there except as I crossed the frontier into Siberia once or twice. But if you mean the Revolution and all the untold suffering it has caused, that part of Russia I hate just as every other sensible person hates it.'

The girl stiffened slightly, and Brooke, noticing it, hastened to add:

'Oh, but hating the Reds doesn't make me dislike the Russian people. I'm only sorry for all the rest of you who have had to live through this terror of seeing everything you once held dear cut from under you.'

The girl rose suddenly, her face tense, and Brooke noticed that the traces of sadness had crept back to frame the determined line of her mouth.

'You need not feel sorry for "the rest of us,"' she said, with a precise enunciation which seemed to cut off each word as though with a knife. 'You need not feel sorry for any of us. No,' she added, as Brooke rose to protest, 'I am tired now and I am going in.' And before Brooke could stop her, she had disappeared into her cabin.

He saw no more of her that day, though he heard her conversing in low tones after the evening meal with Dr. Ma and her father in their cabin. The conversation was punctuated by fre-

quent interjections from old Goluboff, and the attention which the sudden silences showed the other two paid to him made Brooke feel uneasily that perhaps the man was not the idiot he had imagined. He hated himself for his ingrained habit of bluntness which had led him to displease the girl.

'Why couldn't I have held my blessed tongue?' he asked himself savagely. Naturally the Revolution in itself would be enough of a sore point to the girl who loved her country, without his throwing it in her face. Curiously enough, he gave no thought to her possible political opinions. Her behavior he attributed solely to the hurt which he had administered through criticism of her native land.

The conversation in the next cabin continued and, for the first time during the long journey, Brooke felt lonely. He remembered the book he had been reading in the morning, when the shouts of the crew had first attracted his attention to the wrecked boat, and so drew it from his pocket to settle himself for the remainder of his ghost story. As he dropped down under the lamp, he saw that he had pulled out of his pocket with the book the red slip of paper which he had picked up in his final survey of the Goluboff craft. He reached for it mechanically, without any thought that it was more than some trivial memorandum, but, as the Chinese characters caught his eye, he was in a moment engrossed in a text both curious and tantalizing in its palpably esoteric character. It was in the most abstruse literary style and very dif-

ficult to translate, but Brooke's familiarity with the language enabled him to patch it together. A puzzled expression came over his face as he slowly read the carefully written characters.

'I am called Nameless,' it read, 'and am of the Tribe of the Green Turbans. Millions of creatures and plants take their strength from the yellow earth and are subject to the influences of water and fire. The human being is the union of the elements of light and dark. But I serve as pupil to the Great One. I have come from the Country Frontierless. I rode the Ten-Thousand-Mile Steed, which outraces the shadow of the sun. When I was thirsty, I drank of the dew of Heaven; when I was tired, I rested under the red peach tree. The Emperor Wu of the house of Han was a great master. The doctrine of stillness is pure, but the doctrine of action is powerful. In the Jade Mount lies the key of human peace. The Great Flood brings redemption. When the white cock crows thrice, I shall offer sacrifices.'

Brooke puckered his brow in wonder and astonishment. Though the meaning of the characters was clear, the significance of the sentences was lost on him; and, to be sure that he had read aright, he went over the curious text again and again, until he had it by heart. It was written in a peculiarly rhythmic, trenchant Chinese verse that fixed itself readily in his mind and appealed strongly to his imagination, well-schooled in the oblique figurativeness of the Chinese classics. As he looked up finally from his last scrutiny of the strange phrases he started a bit on seeing that his

cabin door had been opened noiselessly and that Dr. Ma was standing there, regarding him quizzically.

'Ah,' said the Chinese smoothly, 'I see that you have found the missing page of my manuscript. I feared that I had left it on the other boat and was much disturbed.'

Brooke laughed as he handed it to the little man and watched him place it carefully in the inside pocket of his coat.

'I say, Ma,' he said, 'what the devil is it all about?'

'You read it?' queried the Doctor, with a slight suggestion of a frown.

'Why, of course,' answered Brooke; 'sorry if I shouldn't have. I picked it up from the floor of your boat, you know, and shoved it into my pocket. It was torn, and I didn't think it amounted to anything. I shouldn't have picked it up at all, I suppose, except that I had gone back to see if anything had been forgotten; and, since that was the only stray bit there seemed to be on board, I put it in my pocket without thinking anything about it. When I pulled out the "Liao Chai" just now, the paper fell out. What is it, a legend or something you are working on?'

'Exactly,' returned the Chinese eagerly — a bit too eagerly, Brooke thought. 'You see we Chinese, who live so far away from our native land, like to do things which will keep us in touch with home. The method I have taken is to rewrite some of the old legends, trying to couch

them in as finished a literary style as is placed at my poor command.'

'I'm sorry for having laughed,' apologized the American. 'I didn't know, you see, about all this; and, if you'll take a look at the section of text on that particular piece of the manuscript, you'll see that the meaning is pretty obscure without the context.'

'Quite so,' said the Chinese. 'In some unaccountable manner this part has been torn. Some time, if you are interested, I should be pleased to have you read the remainder, when you will see, I feel sure, that this particular section fits very nicely into the whole.'

'I should be honored,' said Brooke, 'for I've always been interested in Chinese folk-lore. And I am convinced that the "Ten-Thousand-Mile Steed" and the "Country Frontierless" are well worth having a look at.'

'They are,' replied Ma briefly; and there the matter was dropped — but not apparently from Brooke's subconscious mind. That night he dreamed of riding the sun as his mount in an attempt to flee from the clutches of an all-powerful sorcerer, *Ta Yi*, the Great One, who pursued him on the Ten-Thousand-Mile Steed. Unable to draw away from his pursuer, he turned suddenly upon *Ta Yi* and recited the words he had learned from the red manuscript, whereupon horse, rider, and sun mysteriously disappeared and Brooke found himself sitting bolt upright in bed, muttering:

'When the white cock crows thrice, I shall offer sacrifices.'

He rubbed his eyes for a moment to make sure he was awake, then sank back exhausted and slept; but the words did not leave him.

Brooke was up early the next morning and, when he strode out on deck to take in a few breaths of the fresh, bracing air, encountered Alexandra Goluboff. Both were for a moment embarrassed; then she frankly extended her hand.

'I am so sorry about last night, Mr. Brooke. It must have been the excitement of the day; and then when you said . . .'

'Please,' the man interposed, 'I was a brute. I've been kicking myself all my life for saying just such things as that. Sometimes I think I'll never open my mouth without counting ten first. Am I forgiven?'

'Of course you are,' returned the girl warmly. 'It was I who was at fault, not you. I was too — too quick to take offense.'

Brooke felt again a delicious tremor spread over him. How delightfully she spoke! What an unconscious charm she put into her speech by that little foreign turn which she gave to her phrases, with the English vowels softened into the more musical tones of her native Russian!

'You are a whole lot more than kind,' he said gratefully. 'You know, I should have felt pretty badly, if I had spoiled a possible friendship between us. To tell you the truth,' he continued impetuously, 'from the moment I saw you there at the rapids I was glad you had that accident.'

'Why, Mr. Brooke! In a moment you will be saying that you are in love with me,' she retorted,

with a most engaging twinkle in her eye and raising an accusing finger toward him.

Brooke reddened, then grinned.

'I'll wait a day or two for that,' he blurted out, almost shocked by his boldness; and immediately wondered if he had made a mess of it again with his bluntness and daring. But the girl seemed not to notice, and they went in to breakfast.

With the ice broken in this manner, Brooke was careful to keep the conversation away from Russia so as to avoid further opportunities for disastrous *faux pas* on his part. In the days that followed Alexandra proved to be as fond of walking along the river bank as he; and, since Dr. Ma, like most educated Chinese, did not care for unnecessary physical exertion, the two were left much to themselves. Thus they spent hours strolling along the shore, sometimes going far ahead of their slow-moving craft to drop down on a bit of moss or soft grass to chat and exchange views with the enthusiasm of old companions.

But always there existed between them a more formal reserve. Brooke felt that there was something abnormal about this girl's journeying to Kueilin with a father who seemed little better than an imbecile. More than once, too, he had occasion to feel that Dr. Ma occupied some place in her scheme of things other than that of a casual traveling acquaintance. But he never broached these subjects, for he felt instinctively that her affairs were her own and that, if she did not care to reveal them voluntarily, it was hardly good manners for him to appear inquisitive. Also, on

his part, he kept silent about his own peculiar mission. Why he had woven that partial deception early in their acquaintance about his 'boss' and thereby led her to think that he was in business, he hardly knew; but, once begun, the deception had to be continued.

Still, with both of them young and the world before them, there were many subjects to converse on, light and serious, so that they were never at a loss for material to fill the hours they spent together. As their journey neared its end, Brooke, in spite of the fact that he constantly told himself he really didn't care, felt drawn more and more to this girl, half child and half woman, who could be one moment so gay and the next so serious. Her character seemed quite outside the general world of women in which Brooke had moved and to belong more and more to that of a smaller, more individual sphere in which he had sometimes imagined himself with the ideal personality which he would like ever to keep close by his side. He began to feel sure that they would meet again after parting in Kueilin, if he were to have anything to say about it.

For the girl's father, he still felt the loathing that had filled him at the time of their meeting; and, instead of abating, this aversion strengthened as the days passed. His stupid grinning, always out of place, began to try the American's nerves. He felt positive that the man was half idiot, but whether harmless or malignant, he had no way of knowing, until one day the *laodah* informed him that old Goluboff had rummaged in

his luggage while he was on one of his walks along the bank with Alexandra. Still, whatever his aversion, Brooke was inclined to be charitable, and, after telling the *laodah* to watch the man carefully in the future, dismissed the matter from his mind.

The days slipped by in much the same fashion for a full week after the accident, when they finally were drawing close to Kueilin. Brooke sighed as he thought of the possibility of leaving behind him the girl of whom he had grown so fond. They were walking again, and here the bank was wide and the footpath easy, so that it was only occasionally necessary for the man to give Alexandra his hand to assist her over some particularly difficult place; yet he seemed solicitous to a degree that bespoke self-interest every time they encountered a rugged spot. After a much longer walk than usual, during which they seemed driven forward by some inner motive through awkwardly broken long stretches of silence, they finally dropped down in fatigue to wait for the toiling crew to catch up to them.

'I'm going to be mighty sorry to lose you, Alexandra,' volunteered Brooke after a moment's silence. He tried to make his tone and this first use of her Christian name seem casual; but he was sure that she must have sensed the feeling he had so poorly suppressed.

'I shall be sorry, too,' she returned. 'Perhaps — how long will your business keep you in Kueilin?'

Brooke bethought himself of Li Hang-po's let-

ters. Not once had they mentioned the length of time it would be necessary for him to remain. 'Before the fifteenth of the fifth moon' was all they had said.

'I really don't know exactly — probably not longer than five or six days,' he ventured.

'No?' said the girl. 'Then perhaps we might arrange to journey back together. Father and I shall not remain in Kueilin longer than that.'

Brooke showed a very definite enthusiasm.

'Splendid!' he ejaculated. 'I'll make all the arrangements, and we'll go back together. Six days from to-morrow. You agree?'

'From to-morrow?' repeated the girl. 'Let me see. No, it will be a bit longer than that, Mr. Brooke. Let us say six days from the fifteenth.'

Brooke started and looked at her sharply, expressing audibly his inner thought:

'From the fifteenth day of the fifth moon?'

'Why, yes, according to the Chinese calendar,' replied the girl, with her face puzzled for a moment. Then the thought of some possible significance of her statement seemed to cross her mind and, in her very evident momentary loss of control, she placed her hand upon the man's arm.

'You started, when I said that,' she said tensely. 'Why?'

'Started?' Brooke was trying not to betray his emotion. 'I didn't mean to. I was perhaps surprised to hear you figuring according to the Chinese calendar. Almost no foreigner does, you know.'

They gazed at each other in silence for a mo-

ment, then turned away, each deep in thought; nor was the silence broken before the men came in sight, dragging the heavy junk slowly round one of the bare shoulders of jutting rock.

'Come,' she said, 'let us go down to meet them.'

Her companion followed her, and neither spoke a word until they had nearly reached the boat. Then Alexandra turned with an attempt at gayety which Brooke easily recognized as forced and observed:

'But we are both so silly! Why shouldn't we figure time according to the Chinese calendar, when we are in China?'

Brooke essayed a laugh which caught him in the middle of it with the thought that it was poorly simulated.

'Yes, why not?' he agreed, as they stepped on board and parted.

CHAPTER III

A WILDERNESS OF MYSTERY

EARLY the next day, with the last of the treacherous rapids left behind, the junk approached Kueilin. Brooke awoke with a start from a night of troubled sleep to find Dr. Ma already completing his packing.

'We shall be in Kueilin very shortly,' observed the Chinese after a polite morning greeting. 'You can see the town if you look through the doorway.'

'Thanks,' replied Brooke, following the direction of his companion's glance and catching sight of the rocky plateau upon which the city is built. 'I say, it's quite a place, isn't it?'

'It is estimated to have nearly one hundred thousand inhabitants,' returned Ma. 'Most of the population, however, lives in the river section outside the city proper, so that conditions up there are never crowded. You have not yet been in Kueilin?'

'No,' said Brooke, drinking in the prospect with pleasure. 'By Jove, Ma,' he went on enthusiastically, 'what a wonderful place for a fort! That plateau, with some good big guns mounted on it, could command the country for miles around.'

'Yes,' said the Chinese, joining the American in the door of their cabin, 'even as it stands the city has enjoyed the reputation of being impreg-

nable ever since the Taiping Rebellion. The insurgents besieged it for a month at that time and then withdrew in defeat. Still,' he went on, 'to one who knew the way, it would not be difficult, if only he had a few of his own men disguised within the city itself.'

'No, I suppose not,' agreed Brooke. 'Modern warfare and siege guns would make short work of it.' He sighed dreamily, his mind's eye engrossed in the picture of a modern fort built upon the plateau, stretching above the huge walls to serve as the key to this important part of China which commands the pass into the Yangtze region on the north.

'Oh, well,' he said finally, turning away from his contemplation to put his own articles of scanty equipment into his traveling-case, 'I suppose we shall not have to worry about any one's storming Kueilin for a while.'

'One never knows,' murmured the Chinese, while Brooke, looking at him sharply, thought that he saw his eyes light up for a moment through the mask of his imperturbable face. But he said nothing and, as the Chinese strolled out on deck, he joined him.

Alexandra Goluboff did not appear until they were within sight of the water-front of the town. When she did come out, it was to explain that she had been preparing for going ashore and, since her father could not help himself, the arrangements had kept her longer than she would have wished. With Dr. Ma giving no apparent indication of leaving them alone, it was impossible

for Brooke to seek out any reason for her sudden perturbation during their chat of the afternoon before, and she went back into her cabin without mentioning it herself.

An hour later, as the junk nosed its way between the other craft to a place along the shore, he went aft to their quarters.

'May I look after your luggage and see that you reach your inn safely?' he asked, as she opened the door in response to his knock.

'Thank you,' returned the girl, 'Dr. Ma has kindly consented to do all that for us. He will be met, you see, and we have only to wait for his people to be taken where — where we wish to go.' As she finished, she stepped outside the cabin door and aft along the narrow deck just far enough so that they were both out of sight from within the cabin.

Brooke lingered a moment over the hand which she extended. He felt suddenly rebellious at the practical affairs of life, which seemed to be drawing them apart. A desire that he could not fight down urged him to touch her body, to hold her in his arms, to tell her that he would be miserable and desolate away from her and that he wanted to remain near to protect her. The girl seemed to sense his feeling and drew her hand away, reluctantly but firmly.

'Stephen,' she said, using his name for the first time, 'this is not good-bye. Only a few days, a few short days, and we shall meet again here. You will arrange everything?'

'Rest assured I shall,' replied Brooke with un-

mistakable certainty. 'But Alexandra,' he said, taking her hand once more and looking steadily into her eyes, 'I don't like the looks of this expedition you are on. Tell me that you will be quite safe, that you are not going into danger.'

'I shall be quite safe,' returned the girl, but there was a sense of determination in her voice and the return of the sad lines to her mouth, which made Brooke feel that the 'private affairs' which had brought her to Kueilin had something more behind them than mere personal business. Once more the question which had troubled him all through the previous night shot up into his mind: the reason for the curious coincidence of her repetition of the phrase in Li Hang-po's letters. Again the girl seemed to read his thoughts and, as she once more drew her hand away after a slight pressure on his own, she pleaded:

'Please, you must not ask more, Stephen.' Her eyes emphasized the entreaty in her voice, and the American forced a smile.

'You may trust me,' he said. 'And ten days won't really be long. Remember, you will find the boat waiting right here.'

'Good-bye — till then,' said Alexandra, adding: 'You, too, you will be careful?' and disappeared into her cabin, while the American took leave of the *laodah* and made his way ashore, reluctant for the first time in his life at leaving a woman's presence.

Brooke looked about critically in the crowd of loiterers that swarmed on the water-front, to pick out the most likely individual to whom to address

an inquiry for the street in which Li Hang-po lived. He had about decided on his man, when a young Chinese threaded his way through the loiterers and addressed him in pure, clear-cut Mandarin:

'Are you *Pu Ta-jên?*'

When the American answered in the affirmative to his Chinese name, the young man invited him to accompany him away from the crowded shore. Once in a side street he soon made himself known as a messenger of Li Hang-po. A fifteen minutes' walk brought them to the imperial quarter of the town, which his guide explained had been formerly the residence of the royal prince who had at one time governed Kwanghai. Soon they halted before the house of an evidently well-to-do, but not rich Chinese. For a moment, Brooke was at a loss to know what to do, by reason of the fact that his guide, after having brought him to his destination, had slipped away somewhere quite as mysteriously as he had come. But he was not left long in doubt, for from the house, with tears of gratitude in his eyes for the 'saviour of his life,' as he called him, came Li Hang-po, the ruined gambler of the Taiping Kai; and, as soon as the usual ceremonious greetings were exchanged, the American was ushered into the courtyard and house.

Brooke immediately revealed his curiosity as to the reason for his urgent summons to Kuei-lin.

'Whatever has happened here to make you think it worth my while to struggle through that

long journey up the Fu?' he asked, as soon as they were inside.

'You will soon learn,' the other replied mysteriously. 'In good time you will know all and you will be glad that you have come.'

At this juncture there appeared from one of the inner rooms a stately, fine-looking Chinese of the old school, to whom Li Hang-po introduced Brooke with the deference and respect of a well-bred son of Han for his father. The old gentleman greeted Brooke with unfeigned cordiality and was soon imparting to the still-puzzled traveler some of the reasons for the letters.

'You have saved the life of this good-for-nothing,' he said affectionately and, leaving time only for Brooke's protestations, went on; 'yes, he has told me everything, and for your kindness I am ineffably grateful.' As he emphasized his words with a low bow, the American's reply 'It was nothing, sir,' seemed thoroughly inadequate before the other's earnest look of gratitude.

'My son has urged you to come here,' he went on after a moment, 'to witness something which will be deeply significant and important for you as an official guest in our land. For us it is also most essential that we should have a foreign witness to what is about to take place here. Unscrupulous criminals are planning a revolution in this already excitement-ridden country. Have you ever heard of TAIAN?'

Brooke started. 'TAIAN. . . .' — Quickly he recalled the scene with Whitehead in Canton before his departure. The Consul had received re-

peated rumors of a great organization silently gathering its numbers in China, and somewhere from the meager information they could collect had come the name of TAIAN. He nodded his head as he answered:

'Yes, I have just heard the name, but I know nothing of what it implies.'

'TAIAN, Your Excellency,' explained the Chinese, 'is the movement which is striking at the very heart of China. TAIAN (the Great Peace) is bringing about in our land the Great Unrest. To-morrow you will hear more of it from my son, for he is to be your guide on a journey that will not be without danger; but I know you have courage. Enough for now. The noonday meal is ready.'

During tiffin the Chinese spoke again, giving Brooke more of the reasons for his summons to Kueilin.

'Everywhere among the people the TAIAN men are spoken of. What are they, criminals or conspirators? Many of us consider them simply criminals. All sorts of terrible things occur: here some one is murdered, there a child is stolen, fires break out, graves are dishonored, in the temples holy relics disappear and always it is said that these dreadful acts have been committed under the ægis of TAIAN. The Great Peace! What travesty!' The old gentleman stopped for a moment to lend emphasis to his hatred, then continued:

'The whole region lives in a state of constant fear. Has this systematic harassing of the people

a special purpose? Older, more experienced men think that TAIAN is only a pretext, that in reality the White Lotos and the Trias are at the bottom of it; for secret societies have always acted in this way, when preparing for an insurrection. Often there have been found at the places where murders and robberies were committed, little figures of men cut out of paper, which, according to our belief, possess supernatural powers and, having become spirits, can carry out, as the tools of sorcerers and secret societies, all sorts of cruel designs.

'But above all, Your Excellency — and it is because of this that we have had the temerity to summon you here — the activities of TAIAN are not restricted to local crimes, but the name is mentioned in connection with social and political matters of much broader import. Only a month ago, the guilds in Fatshan declared a general strike. Shortly afterward the lepers broke out of their restricted quarter in the eastern suburb of Canton and spread all over the city. You remember that?'

'Rather,' returned the American feelingly. 'There was a terrible mix-up over it, but I never heard TAIAN spoken of in connection with it.'

'Naturally,' continued the Chinese, 'you would not know it, but we do. We are unfortunately certain that it was TAIAN, a mysterious enigma, a poisonous viper, driving its fangs into the tortured body of China.'

The distress on the old man's face reflected clearly the sorrow which filled his mind. Brooke

instinctively felt a wave of pity for this venerable patriot, against whose revered land mysterious forces were at work. He leaned forward eagerly.

'But Kueilin and the "fifteenth of the fifth moon"? What has that to do with TAIAN?'

'To-morrow you will go on a journey with my son to the Jade Mount,' replied Li Hang-po's father. 'Then you will know all.'

Brooke then saw the old gentleman shift quickly to purely conventional talk and realized that for the moment the topic was closed. Inwardly cursing the strong Chinese love for creating suspense and leaving it unsatisfied, he resigned himself to answering the host's polite questions about his journey from Canton up the Fu.

They retired early, after the old man's admonition that they must be well rested for the exertions of the morrow. When Brooke arose the next morning, he found it raining in torrents.

'Not a very pleasant prospect for a journey,' he muttered as he began to dress.

Li Hang-po came in before he had finished, followed by a servant carrying some Chinese garments.

'You must disguise yourself,' he said, 'for we are going on a dangerous expedition and, in your present foreign costume, you would never be admitted to the gathering we are planning to attend.

'But I say,' objected Brooke, 'I'm too big to pass for a Chinese. I'll be discovered the first crack out of the box.'

'We shall take every care,' insisted his companion. 'You will not be recognized if you keep well in the background and leave me to speak for us.'

'All right,' agreed the American finally, 'but I warn you that I may make a mess of this.'

Li Hang-po smiled enigmatically.

'The rain is fortunate. We shall keep well hidden in our chairs, so that there will be less chance of your disguise being detected.'

With mumbled protests Brooke submitted to the offices of the servant, who had stood silently in the doorway during this interview; and, when they started out half an hour later, he looked the part fairly well, as he huddled down in his chair to keep as much of the rain as possible from his person.

Four coolies swung each of their chairs at a rapid pace along the old opium road from Kueilin to Liuchoufu. The trip was no pleasure jaunt, and Li Hang-po, sensing Brooke's inward protest against this blind journey to a mysterious gathering about which he had been told nothing, delivered himself of a further explanation, still meager, but more satisfying, when they made their stop for tiffin.

'Our spies have informed us that a highly important, secret TAIAN meeting is to take place in a Taoist monastery, called Poyunkuan, near the top of Jade Mountain. It is to observe this clandestinely that we are taking what must seem to you a wild and useless excursion. One of the Taoists in the monastery belongs to our party and

will give us admittance. You are a bit astonished,' he went on, noting Brooke's gesture of surprise, 'when I speak of "spies" and "our party." I am sorry that I may not tell you all, but my lips are sealed by an oath. To explain to yourself the apparent resort to mystery, remember that for every element there is a counter-element; that fire is subdued by water.'

Still unsatisfied, but realizing his companion's reasons for silence with regard to the details of the movement of which he seemed himself to have become a party, the American resolved to await developments with as much peace of mind as he could muster.

On the second day the small town of Yungfu was reached, where the sedan-chairs were left behind and the two conspirators turned to the south, to make their way on foot into the Yao Mountains. Once out of the chair, Brooke draped a big handkerchief over his head, just as the Chinese so often do to keep the sun out of their eyes, but as this particular one did to improve his attempt at a disguise. The rain had at last stopped, and the mountain scenery of this wilder part of Kwangsi was gorgeous in the brilliant sunshine. Though there were no proper roads, Li Hang-po seemed to know his way well, and the American followed him without question. Here and there, a stream cut their path. Sometimes these were but tiny brooks, easily crossed by leaping from one stone to another; but occasionally they were swollen by the rains to muddy torrents, so that the travelers were obliged to wade them, often hip-deep and at

times fighting the fiercely flowing current to keep from being overturned by the swirling waters.

The way led at first through a steep valley, framed by rocky mountains; but, as they progressed, the country grew even wilder and the valley became a densely wooded ravine where they were sometimes forced to break the underbrush that had completely overgrown the little-used trail. Far and near not a human being was to be seen; only now and again the falsetto singing of a shepherd floated down from some Alpine meadow on the mountains. Save for this the country was devoid of all signs of man. At last, Brooke and his companion left the ravine to follow along steep heights, often crossing the summits of the ridges.

Late in the afternoon of the third day Li Hang-po, who was ahead, stopped to point below him. Following the direction indicated, Brooke saw the monastery for which they were making located below a peak now within easy striking distance. It looked like a castle, so dominating and protected was its position. Though many pilgrims came daily to the monastery, practically all of them arrived by the main highway from the west, so that the coming of the two by the mountain trail from the east was not noticed from inside. After they had made their way to the last bit of cover outside the postern gate, Li Hang-po went ahead to search out his secret helper among the Taoists. The Chinese had little difficulty in locating his ally but waited until it was dusk to signal Brooke to join him to follow along the wall

to a small side door, where they entered unobserved one of the numerous ramifications of the building.

The American had been in many monasteries during his wanderings about China and, while he had observed nothing unusual about the exterior of this one to differentiate it from the large number of Taoist temples in the country known as Poyunkuan, immediately upon his entrance he noted the remarkable degree of cleanliness that was everywhere apparent. The priests, with their long hair and flowing white garments, who passed him in the corridor seemed to emphasize this atmosphere of abnormal spotlessness and strengthened the conviction of the foreigner that the leading spirit of the institution must be far above the ordinary level. Li Hang-po's friend was obsessed with fear, Brooke observed, as he cautioned them not to speak above a whisper and in no wise to betray their presence.

'To-night the Great Saint will appear,' he whispered, as he ushered them into an inner room of the wing. 'If it is discovered that I have admitted a foreigner, the head of our order will make me die a fearful death, for he can punish horribly.'

Trembling already at the thought of what might be meted out to him, the Taoist related how the head priest had the year before ordered that one of the members of the monastery be walled up alive in a mountain cavern because, just out of curiosity, he had spied on a meeting of the priests of a higher degree.

'According to the teaching of our Faith, you

may sit here in devotion till you have become a saint and something much higher than we are,' the priest fearfully informed them the Great One had admonished the unfortunate man, just before the last brick shut him off from the light and life. The poor man fairly shook as he conjured up before him the even more dreadful punishment that would fall to his lot if it became known that he had admitted profane persons to such an important meeting as this one was to be.

Li Hang-po and the American sought, as best they could, to reassure the quivering Taoist and swore to him never to betray the fact that it was he who had admitted them. More easy after the oath had been given, the priest bethought himself of his duty as a proper host and brought well-prepared food, wine and fruit to the hungry travelers.

'You will have to wait several hours,' he said, still in the whispered tone. 'The great meeting will begin only when the full moon has risen high in the sky; till then you must be patient. I shall come for you when it is time.' Then he disappeared, and left the travelers alone.

His departure gave them an opportunity to look about them. The room was not large but, like the remainder of the monastery which they had seen, it was scrupulously clean. It was furnished frugally with hard, stiff chairs, on which the Taoist had invited them to be seated, and with two Chinese beds at the back of the room against the wall. The hours dragged slowly along until the wait became unendurably monotonous

to the American. Li Hang-po seemed occupied with his own thoughts and not inclined to converse, which left Brooke to shift about uncomfortably on his chair until driven to seek the comparative ease of one of the beds. After a time his companion followed suit and, sensing the American's impatience, leaned over to say in a whisper:

'It is quite certain that we shall witness something to-night which will be of the most extraordinary importance to my country and to the foreign governments as well.'

Brooke nodded in assent, for by this time he did not at all doubt that something far beyond the range of the ordinary was going to happen. He only wished that the excitement would start, to break the unnerving spell of the monotony. Occasionally footsteps were heard in the courtyard, approaching the door behind which the two conspirators were lodged. Once some one even tried to open it, but the Taoist had securely locked it from the outside and had taken the key with him. As the evening wore on, the wait became a torture of a different kind, for the room began to swarm with mosquitoes and sand-flies, which seemed bent on giving ample proof of their displeasure at the invasion of their quarters. Suddenly Li Hang-po cried out softly:

'I have been stung by a scorpion!'

In the dark he had put his hand over the edge of a small table and thus had touched a scorpion which, as is the habit of these poisonous insects, was sleeping in this apparently seldom-used room on a surface well away from the light. Luckily it

was but a momentary contact with the poison, but, even after Brooke had rubbed the spot with rice wine, the hand began to swell considerably. Though the pain was evidently sharp, the Chinese set his teeth and stoically refused to admit it as anything but a minor casualty.

At last, after Brooke's patience was almost exhausted and after the Chinese had endured much suffering, the door was quietly unlocked from the outside, and the Taoist stood beckoning them from the frame of light. It was already midnight, and the hazy, full moon spread a magic light over the scene, as they stepped into the courtyard and followed their guide, who hurried on noiselessly ahead of them, keeping well in the shadow of the house or the enclosure walls. Their way led through a succession of courts where, even at this late hour, some busy priests and other Chinese slipped out of the shadows into the light, only to disappear again. The guide avoided them as best he could, but the precaution seemed unnecessary, as their passage apparently attracted no notice from those they encountered. The Taoist finally passed around the most sacred court, situated at the back and center of the temple, and led them into a larger enclosure without buildings.

'This is the garden of the ghosts,' he whispered. 'Do not be frightened, they are all plants.'

Brooke looked about him. In the pale, uncertain light of the moon he saw grouped around him, in all sorts of hideous postures, the figures of dragons, ogres, tigers, phœnixes and other beings. He started for a moment and then smiled

at his own discomfiture, as the Taoist explained that they were trees, bushes and flowers, so trained and trimmed by the priests of his order that they took the forms of certain living and ghostly beings. Still the setting, even when he realized its harmlessness, offered no attraction to the American, so that he was glad to have the priest hurry them through this uncongenial plant menagerie. As they reached the farther end of the garden, the Taoist halted them and whispered:

'The rest you must undertake alone. This path will lead you to the one that connects the rear buildings of the temple with the Cavern of the Seven Stars, which is your goal. The people you meet on the way will let you pass unmolested. Should any one ask you the purpose of your coming, say that you belong to the order of the Dare-to-Die's. When you have arrived at the Cavern, enter without fear. There you will witness what you have come to see. Keep well in the dark. After you have seen enough, you can without fear come back to the open air, using the main road through the Temple.'

Both Brooke and Li Hang-po thanked the Taoist profusely for his part in assisting them to witness the ceremonies which they expected would take place in the Cavern. Then, after a final word of caution, the priest disappeared, quietly gliding back through the grotesque figures and leaving the two uninvited guests to attend the festival alone. For a moment they hesitated, until Brooke took the smaller man by the arm and whispered softly:

'Ready, old chap?'

'Yes, for anything but to have you touch that arm. Keep behind me and, if we are stopped, let me speak for us.'

Again, however, the precaution seemed unnecessary. As they proceeded they passed people hurrying along, but they were apparently never scrutinized. The moon had gone behind a cloud, leaving a deep shadow to settle over the entire monastery. Under these conditions there was so little danger of the foreigner being recognized that he stepped along boldly beside his companion. Suddenly, a cliff towered up out of the night, and a doorway in the massive rock was immediately before them. Resting on their bamboo tripods on either side were two huge lanterns, each bearing the characters '*Ta Yi.*'

'The entrance to the Cavern of the Seven Stars,' whispered Li Hang-po. 'You had better get behind me once more.'

Brooke nodded and felt a quickening of his pulse as he looked at the lanterns. 'The Great One,' he muttered to himself and felt that it connoted something in his past few days which he could not quite call up. Something in the scene sent his hand in search of the automatic which he had intended bringing but which he discovered to his dismay he had forgotten. Though the intelligence was hardly reassuring, he shrugged his shoulders and resignedly followed his companion into the grotto, haunted by the unwelcome speculation as to whether he would ever pass through that portal again.

Once inside, they followed a broad, high corridor which led by devious turnings into the bowels of the mountain. After they had gone some distance, the passage widened and raised itself into a vast hall within the rock. As their eyes became accustomed to the change, a wonderful scene presented itself to the two uninitiated who had braved the wrath of *Ta Yi.*

The cavern was illuminated by lanterns diffusing a faint light over the prostrate, kneeling bodies of some hundred men, paying homage to something on the wall in front of them. The object before which they bowed, Brooke noted to his surprise, was not a sculptured idol but, contrary to the ordinary rites of Chinese worship, was a painting. The American finally recognized the ugly visage in the frame as that of Kuan Ti, the God of War, and, in the background behind the martial deity, Chou Tsang, his faithful captain with the black face and the great spear. But the strangest feature of it all to Brooke was that here in this Chinese mountain hall, immeasurably distant from the Occident, the priests were conducting a religious ceremony in almost the same form as that in some of the Western churches. A Taoist, who appeared to Brooke to be an uncommonly powerful man, knelt immediately before the altar under the picture of the idol, while behind him a group of six other Taoists were also on their knees.

'That is the mighty chief priest,' whispered Li Hang-po, pointing to the figure of the conductor of the service. The pair of them had stepped back

into the shadow of the doorway, from which position of vantage they could observe everything that was going on in the cavern without danger of detection. Brooke was spellbound and fascinated by the sight.

The ceremonial worship continued for some minutes in a silence that made it doubly impressive. Then suddenly there burst from a side cavern a quavering, long-drawn trumpet call. Following the dramatically staged initial blast, a nervous, highly peculiar cadence metamorphosed the ceremony of worship, accompanied until now by only the confused murmur of prayers, into a frenzied, warlike dance. While the seven Taoist priests continued to kneel in silent devotion, the congregation of laymen fell to dancing about to this wild rhythm, swinging swords, lances and daggers in an ever-increasing intoxication and working themselves up gradually into an entirely supernatural ecstasy.

As the watchers gazed upon the mad scene being enacted before them, they noticed three men who surpassed the others in their ecstatic passion and who seemed to have the rôle of leaders. They were like dervishes gone mad, with the outlines of their figures dissolved in their whirlings. Their movements exceeded human endurance until first one, then a second and finally the third collapsed in a sea of giddiness. This was the sign for the others, who had carried their devotion to a less violent degree of passion, also to drop to the ground in a state of exhaustion. As the strange music ceased, attention was now centered upon

the high priest, standing upright and facing his people.

'Brothers,' the watchers heard him say, 'you have danced the dance of death before Kuan Ti, the God of War. You are now safe from all physical danger. Fear belongs only to the weak. The little band of the Dare-to-Die's knows no danger.'

A tremor ran through Brooke as he sensed the electric thrill which the words of the priest sent through his Chinese hearers. In a second new life seemed to have been infused into them, for they leaped to their feet, quiet now, though the American felt that, at the least sign from their leader, they could have exerted again in battle or otherwise the energy which they had put into their mad dancing. But there seemed no call for that at present. The Taoist, with a grand gesture, motioned them to their knees once more, after which he and his assistant priests stalked majestically out of the cavern into a corridor which seemed to have opened mysteriously behind the altar and to one side of the picture of Kuan Ti.

The American was brought back to reality by the voice of Li Hang-po whispering:

'Come! We must follow.'

The Chinese took the lead and guided his companion through the less-lighted periphery of the cavern to the entrance of the dark passageway into which the priests had disappeared. Like the corridor from the entrance, this second one, leading further into the recesses of the mountain, had many windings, but, since there appeared to be no

side passages leading out of it, there seemed to be no opportunity for error in direction.

Suddenly Li Hang-po stopped so abruptly that Brooke almost stumbled over him. Though it was impossible in the darkness to discern anything distinctly, the two conspirators, peering intently into the murkiness, finally made out the form of a man blocking their way. Something shiny in his hand reflected the little light that had worked in from somewhere, and Brooke again cursed his stupidity for not having brought with him at least a knife for his defense.

'Who are you?' said the figure barring their way.

'We belong to the order of the Dare-to-Die's.'

As Brooke heard Li Hang-po repeat the password which the Taoist had given them, he instinctively felt that the simple phrase would not be sufficient here, as he seemed at the same time to be transported into another mental world by some suggestive touch. Something told him that this was no ordinary sentry placed in the passageway, but a final barrier between the conspirators and the possibility of profane eyes gazing upon the esoteric rites of their most secret meeting. The sentry did not move. There was but a fraction of a second to think and Brooke, under the spell of the mental influence which seemed to be guiding him, thrust Li Hang-po to one side and faced the shadowy figure:

'I am called Nameless, and am of the Tribe of Green Turbans,' he recited in a singsong, monotonous tone of suppressed excitement, praying as he

did that he might be able to go through with the rest of the phrases he had learned from that stray slip picked up on the abandoned junk. 'Millions of creatures and plants take their strength from the yellow earth and are subject to the influences of water and fire. The human being is the union of the elements of light and dark. But I serve as pupil to the Great One . . .'

As he paused for an instant, a second question issued from the invisible sentry:

'Whence do you come?'

The short delay had sufficed to recall to Brooke's mind the next passage:

'I come from the Country Frontierless. I rode the Ten-Thousand-Mile Steed, which outraces the shadow of the sun. When I was thirsty, I drank of the dew of Heaven; when I was tired, I rested under the red peach tree. The Emperor Wu of the dynasty of Han was a great master.'

The sentry seemed to hesitate for a moment, then put a third question:

'What do you wish here?'

Brooke went on confidently now, thanking the peculiar rhythm of the text for the impression it had made upon his memory:

'The doctrine of stillness is pure, but the doctrine of action is powerful. In the Jade Mount lies the key of human peace. The Great Flood brings redemption. When the white cock crows thrice, I shall offer sacrifices.'

Here Brooke stopped with all his means exhausted, hoping fervently that the torn piece of paper had carried the complete text of this enig-

matical verse. His words, however, seemed to have brushed aside all doubt, as the figure before them melted back into the impenetrable shadow of the passage wall.

'The Great One begs his guests to enter,' came from the unseen lips of the guard.

Motioning Li Hang-po to follow, Brooke stepped past this sentinel, who might so easily have been their undoing.

CHAPTER IV

TA YI, OR THE GREAT ONE

'WHERE did you ever learn the magic watchword of the secret societies?' asked the Chinese excitedly, as he grasped the sleeve of Brooke's jacket. With the fearful danger just behind them, the American felt there was no time for explanations and only whispered back:

'Thank whatever gods you pray to that I did; for, if I hadn't known it, that long knife would be under our ribs right now.'

Li Hang-po shuddered as he realized the crisis through which they had just passed through his temerity in attempting to go beyond the meeting which his Taoist confederate had supposed was their goal. But there was little time for reflection, as the winding corridor now carried them around a sharp corner of jutting rock, beyond which it widened out into an underground chamber, somewhat smaller than the one which they had just left. Instinctively the two conspirators flattened themselves in the shadow of the wall, realizing that they had reached the culminating point of their subterranean adventure. If they came safely out of this rocky hall, they would have accomplished their mission.

'If,' muttered Brooke to himself, as he looked about the chamber.

It was furnished in the manner of a Chinese

reception room. Perfect darkness mantled its jagged walls, while the center alone was faintly illuminated and carried two rows of chairs, facing each other. The seat of honor between, and at the head of the rows was still vacant, while the other chairs were already occupied by representatives, of the most powerful Chinese secret societies, assembled here to enter into a solemn political alliance, as the watchers soon learned from the conversation.

Keeping well beyond the circle of light and shrouding themselves in the comparative darkness of the sides of the room, the two uninitiated crept up behind one of the great supporting columns that had been left in the vaulted rock, which was as near to the rows of chairs as they could come without palpable danger of detection. Most of the conversation was carried on in so low an undertone that it was unintelligible to them, but as they recovered from the pounding throb of their arteries that first distracted them, they heard enough of the preliminary discussion to realize the momentous import of the meeting, not only to China but to the outside world as well.

Suddenly the high priest whom they had seen in the outer cavern arose from one of the chairs.

'You did well to come to the Rocks of Jade,' he said, after welcoming his guests. 'The revered hermit of this mountain, who has attained the highest degree of perfection through pious practices and high arts, has received in himself the spirit of the Great One, of the Principle of Origin, which was before the separation of the light and

the dark, before the creation. In this holy place you will find the path to TAIAN — the Great Peace.'

The approving nods of his hearers greeted him, as he took his seat. From the conversation which followed Brooke gathered who the members of the meeting were. Next to the priest sat the representative of the White Lotos, a man whose profile, as it was occasionally turned so the spies could see it, revealed a sharp energetic face, while opposite him was a short, good-natured-looking fellow considerably younger than the others, whose only sign of fierceness was to be detected in his piercing eyes. Brooke shuddered as he saw the eyes narrowing in the direction of his column and immediately withdrew behind it away from possible detection by this delegate of the terrible Trias. The backs of the envoys sent by the Union of Elder Brothers and the Komingtang were also toward the uninvited guests of the meeting, so that their faces were indistinguishable.

Brooke at once began making careful mental notes. If this thing were really going as far as it promised to, if the general peace of China were actually to be threatened, it was, as Li Hang-po had said, of importance to the whole world and it was consequently incumbent upon him to familiarize himself as thoroughly as possible with the participants in this meeting. Catching every phrase he could, Brooke learned that two important groups were absent from the meeting, but that those present would do all in their power to enlist the Mohammedans of the West and the

Redbeards of the North in the joint work of the secret societies. The joint work! The American shuddered as he heard the phrase. He strained his ears to catch the strategical programme which they seemed to be outlining, but it was only the final summary of the high priest which he heard with any distinctness.

'The secret societies, the Trias, the White Lotos, and the Union of the Elder Brothers,' said the dignitary as he arose again from his chair, 'are to work as the advance guard of TAIAN with all' — he stopped to repeat significantly — 'with *all* sorts of means. The political associations, the revolutionary party and the Mohammedans of the West will carry out the plan of action.'

After the members of the meeting nodded their approval, with a fine gesture the priest continued:

'The Great Flood will bring redemption, even if it should have to pass heedless over mountains of corpses. Neither Good nor Evil exists for us; we believe only in TAIAN, which we shall bring to the world.'

Brooke almost betrayed himself as he sensed the awful significance of the words. 'Mountains of corpses' was the phrase which fastened itself upon him and refused to be obliterated. China, this peaceful land of peaceful people! A suppressed gasp convulsed him, and his lips set in a firm line, as he swore under his breath to lend his life to stemming, if it were humanly possible, the diabolic work which these ruthless criminals purposed to carry out under the name of the Great Peace.

At this moment a figure, almost an apparition, stepped from somewhere into the circle of light. As he seemed to materialize fully at the head of the two rows of chairs, those present sank to the ground. But the Great One, for this, Brooke decided, was indeed the hermit, ordered them to arise at once.

'I am flesh and blood like you,' he said in a wonderfully melodious, almost youthful voice which struck the American as being entirely out of keeping with the figure and face of the old man before him, whose robes of dazzling white seemed to envelop him in a halo of light. 'Do not worship a human being. Pray to the Most Holy One. He will bless the covenant you wish to make. Before Him offer sacrifice and cement the Brotherhood of Blood, which nothing can sever in the future.'

There was a movement in the darkness, and a servitor brought in a white cock. A second attendant cut the throat of the struggling bird, allowing the blood to drip on the ground, while a third lighted an incense burner. Then the high priest stepped forward and, while Brooke and Li Hang-po watched the solemn scene with fascination, he made a small wound with a knife on the arm of each of the delegates and collected therefrom a few drops of blood in a chalice half filled with wine. When the circle had been completed, the mixture of blood and wine was drunk by them all.

'No power can sever the covenant of blood,' pronounced the Great One solemnly, as he blessed the alliance made in such a dramatic way.

Just then there was another movement behind the hermit, and the watchers saw an attendant enter to announce the arrival of 'the foreign guests.' As the Great One assumed the place of honor and the others sat down, there appeared out of the surrounding darkness a young Chinese and a European. While they stood with their backs toward the observers, Brooke made a mental note that doubtless the proselyting previous to the meeting had already borne fruit and that the representatives of the Mohammedans of the West and the Redbeards of the North had arrived to join their brother conspirators.

As soon as the two new delegates had made their obeisance to the Great One, saluting him with respect and ceremony, the European took a seat beside the hermit, while the young Chinese remained standing to address them. At the sound of his voice Brooke started back in astonishment, then bent his every effort in trying to catch the words of the speaker.

'My friend brings greetings from the Communist Revolutionary Committee in Chita,' he said, in a voice that was strangely familiar to the American; 'and I bring you the message that our fellow countrymen in Singapore will support your cause, which is also ours.'

From Singapore! Brooke had hardly had time before to piece together the remarks of his Chinese companion on the boat regarding the possibility of taking Kueilin with a proper method of attack and to construe them in the light of 'the page of manuscript' whose text had served so

miraculously as the key to the entrance of the cavern. Now in a flash everything arranged itself clearly in his mind. Yes, the young Chinese before them was none other than Dr. Ma, his friend of the wrecked junk on the Fu!

Almost synchronously with this discovery another and more staggering thought struck him: Ma's companion — the young European! Brooke strained forward just as the face of the second newcomer was turned toward him. The representative of the Revolutionary Committee in Chita — this figure in European dress, so oddly out of place in this company, was none other than that of Alexandra Goluboff! In his astonishment Brooke grasped Li Hang-po's swollen arm with such force and suddenness that the Chinese unconsciously shrank back with a step that sent an echo through the cavern. In the tenseness of the moment the clear voice of the hermit, who was looking straight in the direction of the pillar behind which the watchers trembled, resounded:

'There are some uninitiated here!'

A movement in the entries to the cavern followed the hermit's warning, as the high priest signaled to the guards. The two uninvited guests hesitated but a second. Brooke had noted an opening in the wall behind them as they had crept along to take their post in the shadow of the pillar, and now, dragging his companion with him, he turned and rushed headlong into its murky blackness. What happened immediately afterwards, he hardly knew. He stumbled along as best he could with Li Hang-po at his heels. In the

darkness they ran time after time against the rocky walls, where the passage in its windings made sharp turns; but nothing mattered. Forward and out of the mountain, was their only thought. Whither the corridor might lead them, neither knew. For a moment the terrible thought grasped Brooke that it might be taking them back to the giant chamber, where the band of Dare-to-Die's had performed their dance of death. As they ran, they heard, far in front of them, a rushing sound, like that of a torrent. Just then an explosion detonated behind them and ill-smelling fumes streamed toward them. But fear had given wings to their feet, so that they sped along in a slightly relieved darkness, affording the deadly vapors no time to thicken about them. The rushing sound drew nearer. They turned a corner and almost ran headlong into its source, an underground waterfall. In the half-light, Brooke discerned a plank leading across the cleft in the rocks. As he leaped toward it, there was a second explosion, that carried the little bridge into the air. The conspirators had cut off their escape from the seemingly bewitched mountain.

A moment of despairing indecision gripped the fugitives. The cleft could not be jumped and, with the plank gone, there seemed no possible way of crossing it. Suddenly Brooke perceived, through the intermittent edge of the falling sheet, that there was the space of a man's body between the rushing waters and the rocky wall behind. The footing on the smooth-worn ledge was uncertain and dangerous, for if the weight of the

water caught them, it would mean certain death in the abyss below. Still there was no choice. Brooke led the way through the edge of the fall, and Li Hang-po followed close at his heels. Moving inch by inch along the narrow shelf, sometimes almost hanging in the air, with their hands, which had been bruised as they ran, catching a hold wherever one could be found, they made their way slowly and fearfully across the cleft behind the roaring fall. Brooke felt his strength increased to a previously unknown degree by the inexorable demands of the moment. Finally, as he placed his feet on the safe footing of the passageway at the other side and looked around to see Li Hang-po close beside him, he sank down to the ground with nerves and force suddenly exhausted by the grueling experience they had just passed through.

But it was only for a moment. Realizing that, though their pursuers would not follow them across the cleft, they would probably have left the mountain by another exit and be waiting for them at the mouth of this corridor, they scrambled to their feet and hurried along. As they rounded the first corner, the light increased considerably. Another turn and they could see before them the mouth of the passageway — and daylight! They approached it with most stealthy caution, but found, to their infinite relief, no human soul in sight.

As they hurried out of the mountain labyrinth, the sun of a new day flushed the horizon. A wide panorama of mountain and valley spread before

them, into the farthest reaches of which Brooke's eyes searched for the city for which they both yearned. But it was nowhere to be seen. Though they were out of immediate danger, they were not yet safe. Li Hang-po reminded Brooke of this, saying positively:

'We must on no account attempt to return by the way we came. Those bloodhounds, the Dare-to-Die's, will guard every exit from the mountain. In the hills we shall find our only safety, for there the Yao, the aborigines, will protect us so effectively that we need feel no danger.'

Knowing nothing whatever of the country, Brooke submitted to his companion's suggestion and set off with him down the mountain. Though they had passed a sleepless night, the excitement spurred them on without the returning sense of fatigue. In the beauty and invigoration of the morning they stepped briskly along, while Brooke related to his companion how he had come into possession of the magic sentences which had opened for them the inner recesses of the Jade Mount.

Li Hang-po shook his head as the American revealed to him that the two foreigners at the meeting were his fellow travelers on the Fu, then said gravely:

'Those people will probably never associate you with the persons who were spying on them in the cavern. You must go on watching them, especially the Russian Communist. We have suspected for a long time that the TAIAN group had a working connection with foreigners of their own

turn of mind, but we have never been sure until now.'

Brooke was silent. In the excitement of their escape he had almost forgotten that Alexandra had been the disguised Communist at the meeting and he was glad that he had not revealed the identity of the girl to Li Hang-po. He felt his heart dully sink within him. Alexandra, about whom he had begun to weave such pleasant fancies, a Communist, leagued with a band of ruthless conspirators in a plan which would upset the entire social order of China! He could hardly realize the awful import of her presence there and he lapsed into a moody silence, occupied with these moody thoughts. How was he to meet her and converse with her now? Li Hang-po was right. She would certainly never identify him as one of the spies in the cavern. Of course, the darkness had made recognition quite impossible, so that he became easy in mind on this question. Now what course was he to follow? Above all things, he decided, he must not betray to her his duplicity but must try to learn the reason for her association with the secret societies. Somewhere, he felt sure, there was a big mistake.

As his meditations were interrupted by the barking of a dog, Brooke looked up to see a Chinese, apparently a peasant, approaching them with his animal on a leash. When the man came nearer, Brooke noted that his hair was of a reddish tint, something very infrequently found among the Chinese. He was a small, alert man, who greeted them in a friendly manner; but his

dog, a black Canton chow, kept barking furiously and would not stop.

Li Hang-po was frankly nervous and whispered to Brooke that the peasant was in reality a spy of the Dare-to-Die's.

'He is one of the three leaders of the death dance of last night,' whispered the Chinese. When Brooke appeared incredulous, he insisted:

'I am absolutely certain of it, for his face is deeply imprinted on my memory.'

For half an hour after this incident the travelers walked along at a brisk pace. As they swung round a turn, they discovered three small groups of Chinese converging on a point in the mountain trail which the two must pass. They carried guns and, as Brooke watched them nervously, he saw that they were making signals to one another. If there had been a doubt in his mind at first seeing them, he was now convinced of the necessity for flight and broke into a run with Li Hang-po at his heels. Luckily the Chinese did not shoot, for they were evidently intent on taking the fugitives alive to make sure of finding out all they knew.

With driving fear as their pacemaker, Brooke and his companion reached the critical crossing ahead of their pursuers, only to be held up by a chow dog — the bloodhound of the pretended peasant — jumping between Brooke's legs. With the club which he had picked up on the mountain against a possible close-up, he put him out of the chase with a blow on the head; but it cost him precious seconds before the oncoming band of

Dare-to-Die's. Once off again, Brooke noted with dismay that they were well-trained fellows and that they were gradually drawing closer. Consequently he changed the course sharply to make toward a thickly wooded dale in the almost vain hope of eluding the certain capture which seemed but a matter of minutes on the open path.

As he gained the first of the undergrowth, slightly ahead of his smaller companion, several figures sprang up with a chorus of yells from the thicket. Li Hang-po greeted them joyously, as Brooke started back in alarm.

'It's all right! They are the Yao, and we are safe now.'

His words proved to be true. The leader of the party blew his horn, and immediately the thicket swarmed with the wild hunters whose appearance had so providentially saved the fugitives from capture.

'You are good people,' said the leader, who later turned out to be a sorcerer. 'Unarmed folk may enter our mountains; but not those over there with their guns.'

The American followed his glance back toward their recent pursuers. The Dare-to-Die's had already recognized the futility of continuing the chase and were turning back dejectedly toward their mountain catacomb. These were free hills and, since it was well known that the Chinese Government soldiers had often returned with bleeding heads from attempting to enter the territory of the Yao, who jealously guard their liberty, it was but natural that this lawless band of pur-

suers should shrink from picking a quarrel with the aborigines.

With the danger of capture removed, Brooke turned to study their deliverers. Tall, slim men, they seemed to the American handsomer and more manly than the Chinese. The most curious part of their dress was the arrangement of the hair, which was brushed straight back and tied in a top-knot, recalling the plume on the helmet of the French *cuirassier*. Li Hang-po explained later that these were members of the tribe of the Wild Yao, or Mountain Sons, belonging to the group of the Long-haired Yao.

The hunters received their guests in the fashion of the American Indians, asking them to smoke a pipe with them and, with this ceremony completed, sent them on their way with precise directions as to how they might safely get back to Yungfu. To be sure that they should not miss their road, the sorcerer accompanied them for a short distance. He was an interesting, talkative old fellow and explained to the strangers that he had held communion with the god of the village early that morning and had received assurances that he would that day rescue good men from the clutches of unscrupulous murderers. Brooke silently praised the omniscience of the village deity of the Yao, who dwelt somewhere in a tree in the wilderness, and, at parting, gave the sorcerer his watch as a practical expression of his gratitude to the tribe. The old fellow received it with tears flooding his eyes, blessing them and calling down the protection of the gods upon their

journey. In his turn, he reached inside the folds of his garment and drew out a peculiarly carved little wooden image, patted it and ceremoniously delivered it to Brooke with both his hands, instructing him to keep it always and to show it especially to any of the Yao from whom they might desire assistance on their way to Kueilin. After leaving the old man, the remainder of the distance to the city was accomplished without disturbing incident.

The way of the travelers led through the territory of the aborigines, where they found the tribes always friendly and courteous, especially when they showed their little talisman. They passed, too, through fields cultivated by the Pan Yao. Li Hang-po explained to Brooke that the tribe bore that name because the men and women on feast days wore a *pan*, or small piece of wood, wrapped with cloth and tied across the head over the temples. However, this was no feast day, and the Yao were attired in their working clothes. The men were dressed simply in the regular Chinese fashion and wore turbans; while the women, richly adorned with silver, had as a head-covering a little bonnet shaped like a sugar loaf and long overgarments of blue material reaching below the knees. These people were cultivating their fields with long rows of men and women working together, while behind each row marched a drummer, beating a measured cadence. Brooke and Li Hang-po stopped at one of these fields to watch. If one of the workers lagged in the rear, or seemed particularly lazy, the drummer at once

beat a sharp roll behind the delinquent, which was both the sign and the authority for the others to laugh at the laggard receiving this special attention. In this way, explained Li Hang-po, the Pan Yao till their fields in common, all the members of the community joining forces to work one another's lands.

It was a pleasant and peaceful sight, and Brooke shuddered as he thought of the conspirators back in the mountain, plotting to metamorphose such quiet happiness into unspeakable chaos. Reluctantly, he turned away from the amusing spectacle and followed his companion down the valley. Late that evening they were once more near Chinese habitations and, some time during the night, arrived at Yungfu. After a good rest from the excitement of the last twenty-four hours, they took to their waiting sedan-chairs and made Kueilin on the evening of the second day, physically beaten out, but mentally stimulated to an intense degree by all that they had gone through.

CHAPTER V

THE TALISMAN

THE excitement and fatigue of the long journey had so completely exhausted Brooke that he was greatly relieved when Li Hang-po's father supplemented his ceremonious greeting with the suggestion that he retire to his chamber to rest. It was already evening, and the telling of their tale could wait until the morrow.

'My son will stay and give me all I need to know for the courier who goes north to our allies to-night. Both of you are tired, but this good-for-nothing must remain with me for a time.'

Brooke smiled a little as he heard the epithet, so charmingly belied by the look of deep affection which the handsome old fellow cast upon his son, and went upstairs, amused by the quaint custom which makes the Chinese deprecate the accomplishments of their relatives in such a naïve fashion.

Exhausted, he threw himself upon his hard Chinese bed, expecting sleep to come immediately; but apparently the events of the Cavern of the Seven Stars were still too much for him. Even the safety which he felt in the house of Li Hang-po failed to woo the slumber that he sought and he tossed restlessly about, his mind constantly conjuring up the picture of Alexandra Goluboff, attired in men's clothing and sitting in

the company of those whom Brooke felt to be rank fanatics. With this came the thought of the return journey down the Fu. He had arranged with the captain of the junk which brought them up the river to wait the ten days of their stay in Kueilin and carry them back to Wuchow. His thought of the boat recalled the thrill of the moment when he had parted with Alexandra. The morning sun had lighted up her face, banishing the lines of care and making her even more the adorable child she had at first seemed. Brooke smiled as he lay there in the dark and pondered over it all. What was it she had said?

'You — you will be careful, Stephen?'

Then the picture faded; the Cavern of the Seven Stars slipped into its place, and she was sitting there beside the hermit whom they called *Ta Yi*, the Great One. The American felt again the sharp stab which had pierced him as he realized who it was. She had looked then, he remembered in his fleeting glance of her, just as she had that first night on the junk when he loosed his ideas about the Revolution. Now he knew why she had left him so abruptly to return to her cabin and understood only too well why she had drawn herself up with such dignity — she, Alexandra, a child of the Revolution, an important cog in the wheel which was grinding out the life of the flower of Russia. A groan of real distress burst from Brooke in spite of himself, shaking his whole frame.

What was he to do? He still had two days before the time of their rendezvous. Should he take

the house-boat himself and leave them to commandeer another? It would be easy, and then the pain which he was sure to feel at their meeting would be avoided. Or, there was the road, over which he could return to Wuchow and thence proceed by steamer to Canton. He pondered over both solutions, but found that neither seemed to satisfy.

Something stronger drew him toward the girl. He tried to be frank with himself, to insist that he cared nothing for any woman, especially one who could ally herself with such a cause; but always something within him kept repeating: 'She is only a child, she is only a child.' And with a vision of her before him, laughing, girlish, beautiful, he was carried off into a light slumber by the rhythm of the refrain.

The picture was with him while he slept, so that in his dream he was back in the Cavern of the Seven Stars. Alexandra was there, a ridiculous figure waving a red flag before his eyes and chanting:

'I am only a child, I am only a child.'

Brooke tried to reach her, to save her from the ten men who stood behind her, but just then a slight man with red hair, the peasant whom he and Li Hang-po had encountered at the foot of the mountain, stepped between them. As Brooke leaped forward, the man raised a chow dog in his hands and threw the snarling, snapping animal right at him. A flash before the impact, the American awakened with a start and sat bolt upright in bed.

The figure of the red-haired man had been so vivid in his dream that Brooke was not startled by what he considered to be an apparition of his own creation until the figure in the moonlight moved distinctly and showed the play of the silver light upon unmistakably natural hair of a reddish hue. He rubbed his eyes for a moment, then, with a full realization of the intruder, leaped from his bed to get his automatic. But the Chinese was quicker than he and dropped from the low window to the soft ground so swiftly that, when Brooke reached the opening, there was no sign of him nor any suggestion of where he had made his exit from the court. For a moment he hesitated, then turned back. It would be no use attempting to find him in the maze of Chinese gardens and houses, he decided, and consequently no point in arousing the members of the household. So he simply slipped his automatic under his pillow and finally went off into a deep slumber after all his imaginary and real disturbances of the night.

He was awakened in the morning by an excited shout from the doorway and opened his eyes to find Li Hang-po standing there, pointing with fear to a little paper figure of a man fastened to the door-post.

'How did this Trias charm get here?' he asked, showing fear in every line of his face.

Brooke jumped up, thoroughly awake, to examine the evil talisman. When he explained to the Chinese the appearance of the man in his room the night before, Li Hang-po burst out:

'In the name of all good spirits, try in the future to be on your guard. No doubt you were to have been murdered in your sleep. The Dare-to-Die's of the Great One will pursue you with their hate and use their witchcraft against you. Wait a bit!'

He rushed from the room to return in a few moments with two objects, which he thrust into Brooke's hands.

'Here, take these,' he said in an imploring voice. 'This dagger and image will guard you against sorcery, and you must always carry them with you, wherever you go.'

Brooke tried laughingly to convince the trembling Chinese that his adventure of the night before had been quite outside the realm of witchcraft. He had clearly seen the invader and felt sure that it was the red-haired leader of the dance of death in Jade Mount. Li Hang-po did not at all doubt the appearance in the flesh of the red-haired one; it was the paper figure about which he was so worried.

'These little men can take human form and have supernatural strength,' whispered the Chinese, who had so conclusively demonstrated his courage in the Jade Mount. 'But these charms will protect you.'

Brooke examined them and found one to be a dagger made of copper coins and the other an utterly obscene picture.

'The picture attracts and stops the spirits, which are stupid and greedy like all ghosts; then the dagger kills them,' explained the Chinese with implicit faith.

Brooke, though not at all convinced of the efficacy of the charms, could see no value in disappointing his friend and so packed them in his traveling-case, as Li Hang-po had directed, and then continued with his dressing. As he finished, his friend reappeared and announced that his father wished to see their guest in the reception room. The old Chinese greeted him gravely and bowed him to a seat.

'You have seen and heard very important things,' he said, after he had thanked Brooke for accompanying his son on such a dangerous mission. 'The conspiracy of the secret societies and revolutionary associations under the spiritual guidance of a fanatical Taoist sect is a fearful danger to China. It must be of the highest interest to you as a foreigner to know that certain foreign elements have some reasons for supporting this movement.

'We, you and ourselves, are now allies. Just as those rascals in the Jade Mount swore a covenant of blood, in the same way should we hold together. The common danger alone, to say nothing of our mutual interests, will cement our covenant; for, believe me, those bloodhounds will not give up the pursuit of the uninvited witnesses of their conspiracy.'

Brooke was human enough to take no pleasure in the words which the old Chinese pronounced so fearfully, and for a moment he caught himself wishing he had disregarded the letters of Li Hang-po and remained in Canton. Then his mind swung back to the fanatical meeting in the

Jade Mount and to the oath he had sworn to himself to do everything in his power to break up their hideous game. He steeled himself against further disarming thoughts and listened attentively to the old gentleman's statement.

'Following my orders, my son will go north in a few days to warn all our co-workers and to urge them to greater activity,' the old patriot said, quite as a general might outline his plans of campaign to a staff officer. 'We too have powerful resources. The Fang Huo Tuan (the League for Prevention of Disorder) has the gates well under control and will take care that the rising flood does not break through.' He stopped, apparently lost in thought.

The American, seeing that the interview was ended, respectfully took his leave and joined Li Hang-po.

The two succeeding days passed rapidly. The young Chinese conducted Brooke about the ancient city which was his home, giving him the history of the beautiful temples and official buildings with which Kueilin abounds. They spent hours strolling along the top of the great city wall, a never-ending source of fascination for Brooke, who wound many fancies about their massive strength. Now and again the words which Dr. Ma had spoken as they neared the city recurred to him. When he recounted them to Li Hsien-shêng, the Chinese shook his head.

'He is right,' he said sadly. 'With a sufficient force of traitors inside the city Kueilin would fall, though without siege guns its position is im-

pregnable from without. It is this inner danger which our party must combat; and we shall do it.'

'I'm sure you will,' the American said, affectionately laying his hand on the shoulder of his friend; 'and, when the fighting begins, remember that you are to give me a chance. This danger of destructive revolution is one which the whole world shares and must combat, Li Hang-po.'

'I thank you,' said the Chinese simply, expressing his gratitude in his eyes. 'The moment you are off for Canton I, too, shall prepare for the road. My destination is Peking where I shall remain until my father summons me back to Kueilin. This may be months, so that, if you come there, we shall meet again.'

The next morning Brooke took leave of Li Hang-po in the house of his father. The Chinese had wanted to accompany him to the water-front and see him safely on board his craft, but the old man, who had been apprised of the identity of the American's traveling companions, decided against it.

'No,' he said definitely, 'it is better, my son, that you do not run the risk of meeting these adversaries of ours face to face. If Mr. Brooke is to act as our ally in watching their movements and doing what he can to circumvent them, it may be unwise for you to expose yourself to them; for there is always the chance of your being recognized, a circumstance which would be sure to make the foreigners suspect not only you, but their traveling companion as well.'

The wisdom of the father's statement was so

palpable that Li Hang-po could do nothing but bid his companion in adventure an earnest good-bye and summon the guide who had brought the American from the water-front to accompany him on the return journey. Brooke was secretly glad, for he had managed to keep from his friend the real identity of the European they had seen in the cavern; and, if Alexandra had already reached the boat, Li Hang-po's suspicions might be aroused.

The courtly and dignified bearing of the old man, as he bade him good-bye, touched a chord of deepest sympathy in the American. Just before he turned to go, the Chinese patriarch extended his hands and ceremoniously presented to Brooke a small, personal seal, the sides of which were chased with a finely carved dragon.

'I cannot give gold and silver,' he said, 'for I am but poor. Please keep this small seal as a remembrance and, if it be Heaven's will, perhaps as a protection from danger.'

Brooke accepted the seal gratefully and, placing it carefully in his pocket, took the usual ceremonious farewell from the two men, through whose invitation he had witnessed such strange and important happenings.

During his journey to the water-front Brooke's mind was occupied with a multitude of conflicting emotions. Soon he would be greeting Alexandra, whose adversary he had unwittingly become during the short ten days of their separation. Not only must their political opinions differ, he thought, but he must fight against her as well, must do everything in his power to frustrate the

plans for a revolution in which she seemed to have such a dangerous part. The consequences of her action could lead to nothing but a lasting antagonism — a fact which Li Hang-po's father had already pointed out and with which Brooke had been forced to agree.

What was he to do then? Follow them secretly and have them arrested in Wuchow by the Chinese authorities upon their arrival there, before they could take the steamer for Canton? This action would necessitate proofs and what could he produce to establish the fact that these two Russians and Dr. Ma were dangerous enemies of China? Then, too, reasoned the American, his position as an official of the Consulate would be a somewhat peculiar one, since the arrest would necessitate his explanation of just how he happened to be a witness of the secret meeting in the Cavern of the Seven Stars.

There seemed to be no way out of his difficulty save to return to Canton and explain to his chief the diabolical plans of TAIAN — a decision which was perhaps furthered by the constantly recurring thoughts of Alexandra. One especially kept hammering at him: she was not yet a woman, only little more than a child; and surely she could not willingly be party to a criminal movement. Doubtless, he thought, she had acted from honest conviction without realizing the identity of her allies and of what fearful deeds they were capable. The more he pondered the matter, the more certain it became to him that this girl little appreciated what consequences her presence in that

Chinese assembly might entail. More and more he came to feel, as he hurried along behind his guide, that his real task was to protect her from herself. Perhaps in some way an opportunity would present itself of having a serious talk over the whole affair; perhaps, too, in this way he would learn more of the movement, so that his prudence and caution would lead to securing more important political information than he yet possessed. The decision reached, his brow cleared and he strode along with greater resignation and, if the truth be told, with no little anticipation for the prospect of rejoining his companions on the junk.

When he arrived at the water-front, his guide turned back and he found the junk just where he had left it and there on the deck the imperturbable figure of Dr. Ma, looking quite as though he had been there all the time and as though nothing unusual had happened to him during the ten days of their separation.

'Hello, Ma,' Brooke called, as he swung aboard with his traveling-case, 'all ready for the trip back to Wuchow?'

'Good-day, Mr. Brooke,' returned the Chinese in his precise English. 'Yes, we are all quite ready, thank you. We came aboard last night and have waited only for your arrival.'

'Miss Goluboff and her father are on board, then?'

'They are in their cabin, and, if your affairs are in shape, you have only to order the captain to push off.'

'Good,' returned Brooke. 'I think I'll speak to Miss Goluboff first.'

'Coming,' called a voice in response to Brooke's second impatient knock. As the door opened and Alexandra's figure stood framed within it, he almost started at the haggard look in her face and the deep circles beneath her eyes.

'I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting,' she said apologetically. 'I was lying down and must have been dozing. How are you, Stephen? I am so glad to see you again.'

'I'm a lot more than glad to see you, Alexandra,' said Brooke, enforcing his words by the warmth of the handclasp he gave her. 'But . . . but you look so tired. You have evidently not slept well.'

'No, I have not slept . . . a great deal,' she said. 'The . . . the business required so much of our time. I fear that I shall be but poor company on the way back.'

'It was most inconsiderate of me to disturb you. Please go back and lie down. I promise not to bother you again before tiffin. But,' he added after a pause, 'I had to see you, Alexandra, just to . . . ask if you are ready to start . . . and just to look at you for a minute.'

A smile slipped across her lips and brightened her tired eyes.

'It was good of you, Stephen,' the girl whispered. 'I should have felt it keenly, if you had not come immediately.'

'You're a dear,' responded Brooke impulsively.

He had feared this meeting. The awkwardness

of it had frightened him in contemplation; but now another sort of embarrassment gripped him, which he knew had no connection with Alexandra's recent escapade in the Jade Mount. Try as he would, he could not hate her for it; and, as the door closed and he turned aft to find the captain of the boat, he smiled, and made his way toward the stern, humming to himself.

'Poor child,' he stopped in his tune long enough to murmur. Time enough, he thought, to straighten out the tangle into which they seemed to have involved themselves. Just now the girl needed rest, and he would not bother her with stupid cross-examinations.

CHAPTER VI

DOWNSTREAM THROUGH THE PIRATES

THE passage down the Fu slipped by with great rapidity. Although it had taken ten days for the crew to fight their way up the rapids, on the return journey the junk fairly flew like some great water bird skimming the rushing foam, so that the ancient Kueilinese *laodah* smilingly informed Brooke that he might confidently expect to be in Wuchow on the second day out.

To his chagrin, Brooke saw little of Alexandra Goluboff during the rapid trip. At first he felt that she avoided him, but later he realized that she was far too tired to be in any mood for conversation. Also, her father seemed to be having one of his bad spells and almost constantly required her care.

In the evening, however, when Dr. Ma had retired to the cabin to read, the girl joined Brooke, as he stood smoking on the for'ard part of the deck.

'Father is asleep,' she explained, 'and I wanted a bit of air before going to bed.'

'Do sit down,' said Brooke, pushing a chair forward.

'Thank you, I should rather stand for just a moment.'

She stood behind the chair, and neither of them spoke. Brooke felt a surge of emotion obsessing

him, as the wind caught her hair and rippled it over her forehead in soft, tantalizing waves. He longed to take her in his arms and drive away the lines of care which the ten days in Kueilin had cut even deeper than they were when he first saw her. He felt that he would have given anything to bring back one of her child-like smiles. Then his desire carried him further and he wanted her close to him — wanted to see all the barriers that seemed to stand so relentlessly between them swept away with the immortal touch of her lips. He sighed, as, instead of all this, he mustered up only courage enough to place his hand over one of hers, that rested on the back of the chair. Without any apparent intention of withdrawing it, she simply looked up at him and smiled:

'I am so dull to-night, Stephen,' she said apologetically. 'You mustn't mind me. In a day or two, perhaps, I shall feel more like talking; but now it seems as though I could stand here without a thought in my head, watching the stars forever, and never come back to earth.'

Her fingers curled up to press his, as she continued almost to herself: 'Life is hard sometimes.'

'Alexandra,' was the man's only answer, as his arm slipped hesitatingly over her shoulders. Though she did not move away, he felt her aloofness.

'Don't make it harder,' she whispered, as her eyes turned up to his. 'My life is full — so full that I must not let anything else slip in.'

'But won't you let me help? Isn't there some way?'

'There is no room in my life for any but friends,' said the girl, with a decision in her tone which the American plainly felt. 'If you can be that,' she added wistfully, and then broke off. Suddenly she seemed to collapse, and he found her sobbing against him, with his arms folded close about her. 'Stephen, Stephen, I need help and friends so badly!'

Coherence left Brooke, and phrases tumbled out one after another. Gone was the Alexandra of the cavern, and in her place stood a child, a girl to be loved and cared for. But her lapse was only for a moment.

'I am mad — mad,' she said tensely, as she straightened herself once more and brushed the tears from her face. 'I should not have given way. You know now — you know that I *might* love you. Yes, I am not afraid to say it, I *do* love you; but I am a Russian.' She drew herself up proudly. 'Do you know us as we are to-day? Do you know how we can bury our emotions, our desires, everything that makes life dear to us, for our ideals? That is what *I* must do, and *you* shall help me, Stephen.'

'This is nonsense, dear,' Brooke protested. 'Alexandra, I love you. I have never loved before. You are the first woman I have ever seen who has awakened anything within me. Do you think then that I am going to lose you or give you up? Ideals? I love you, do you hear — I love you!'

The girl placed her hand over his mouth with a gesture of infinite tenderness.

'Do not say it again,' she commanded. 'You, too, must bury your emotions under the pressing weight of duty. There is a gulf between us of which you know nothing. I cannot tell you. I do not want to. If I did, you would hate me; and I want you to . . . to like me.'

'I know,' replied Brooke eagerly, 'I know . . .'

'You know nothing of it,' replied the girl. 'Good-night, dear.'

She pressed his hand and was gone, leaving him standing there bewildered, his emotions so hopelessly mixed that nothing seemed clear to him. Over all hung the one dominating thought: Alexandra was a revolutionist, seeking to overturn the social order of China — and yet he loved her. He remained on the deck for hours, gazing into the night and dreaming. It was early morning when he finally slipped into his cabin to sleep.

They arrived in Wuchow the next day without incident, and without Brooke's having had another opportunity for a conversation with Alexandra. Again it seemed apparent that she was avoiding him and, when they did meet, Dr. Ma's presence precluded the possibility of continuing their talk of the first evening. In Wuchow, they left their house-boat for the more spacious comfort of the Kwangsai, on which they were to complete their journey down the West River to Canton.

On the steamer, Alexandra's continued avoidance of him began to bring back his old misgivings, though they were obscured to no small extent by the new emotions which she had awak-

ened in him. Though he saw her frequently, it was always at a distance or in the presence of others. Finally, when she was alone at the stern of the ship and the opportunity did seem ripe for uninterrupted conversation, contradictory emotions rose within him and kept him away from her like a sulking schoolboy.

Noticing his apparent indifference, she beckoned to him. Reluctantly, with the reluctance of hurt vanity, he went, to see her hold out her hand frankly toward him.

'I have been unkind, Stephen,' she said simply. 'Please forgive me.'

Though there was a delicate feminine persuasiveness in her tone which melted Brooke, still the hurt vanity demanded its pound of flesh.

'You have deliberately avoided me,' he answered almost sullenly.

'You know why,' returned the girl. 'It was because I was afraid.'

'Of what?' demanded Brooke persistently.

'Of myself,' replied the girl quietly, after a pause.

The knife had cut deep, and Shylock was appeased.

'It is good of you to admit it. I . . . I thought perhaps you didn't want to see me.'

'I have fought it out with myself. I am strong again now and I do not fear.'

'But, Alexandra . . .' began Brooke, then broke off, as he saw Goluboff approaching them and turned away from the silly grin that seemed to be always on the old man's face.

'Please believe in me,' whispered the girl. 'I can say nothing more.'

Inwardly cursing the untimely appearance of the half-idiot, Brooke strolled away. He stopped to glance into Dr. Ma's cabin but found the Chinese at work over a pile of papers, quite apparently in no mood for conversation. At odds with himself for his own annoyance, he sought his quarters to read.

Late in the evening the Kwangsai passed through the gorges of Suihing. Brooke, somewhat more resigned to his fate, sought out Alexandra and found her on deck with Captain Wilson, a big Englishman, who was master of the vessel. In the half-light, before the waning moon had risen, the canyon-like walls of the gorges took on an almost ghostly appearance. Under the spell the trio became silent, each absorbed in his own thoughts, until the Captain suggested a 'night-cap' in the dining-saloon.

Hardly had they seated themselves at the table when there was a wild scream from the quarters of the third-class passengers aft. A shot resounded, followed in quick succession by others. Captain Wilson jumped to his feet and rushed out on deck, drawing his revolver as he ran. A coolie made at him, brandishing an enormous piece of wood, which he was using as a club. The Captain shot without a moment's hesitation. As the coolie fell, a second shot from the after quarter of the vessel stretched Wilson lifeless on the deck, with a bullet through his breast.

Brooke stood speechless for a second following

the catastrophe. It had all happened so quickly that he had hardly time to collect his thoughts before he heard the voice of the girl beside him:

'Have you your revolver, Stephen?'

'No,' replied the American, now fully realizing the danger of the situation. 'Stay here, Alexandra, and I'll get it in a minute. There ought to be enough of us to stop these damned pirates.'

'No, no,' said the girl, catching his arm and drawing him down beside her. 'They will not touch us foreigners. It was only because he resisted that the Captain was shot. Stay here.'

Before he could protest, even though he realized the wisdom of her words, the door burst open and a blood-spattered Sikh rushed in to fall at Brooke's feet.

'What the devil does this mean?' asked the American gruffly.

'I stand guard before third-class grating,' the fellow said in a tremble. 'Second-class Chinese pull me down from behind, and one of them stab me when I try fight. All third-class passengers let out, and whole ship have got pirates now.'

Alexandra Goluboff, with surprising coolness, tore a strip from the tablecloth to bind up the Sikh's wounds, as Brooke went to the door and heard the rush of many feet from the after quarter of the vessel and a voice just outside the deck-house calling:

'Leave the foreigners in there alone. They are harmless people.'

The voice had a hauntingly familiar ring. For a moment Brooke imagined that it was Dr. Ma who

was giving commands to the pirates in such an authoritative tone, but too many other thoughts were crowding his brain to allow him to evaluate properly the impression. There was wild confusion on deck and incessant screaming in the holds and cabins, interrupted now and then by the crashing of planks. That the pirates were making a thorough job of plundering the ship was apparent to Brooke. He was at a loss to know what was best to do; for, while his fighting instinct urged him to rush to his cabin, take his revolver and use it against the robbers, his more sober judgment told him that he could accomplish nothing useful in the face of the overwhelming numbers of the assailants. Captain Wilson had done the most foolish thing possible when he shot, since Chinese robbers usually kill only when armed resistance is made. From his long experience on the river he must have known this, but under the pressure of attack, he had lost his head and fired.

Just as he was debating the point, the door was again burst open and three of the pirates entered and threateningly ordered the American to come out, paying no attention to the girl. With a quick, reassuring glance at her he followed them without question, feeling sure that they wanted only to prevent him from taking part in any attack upon them by tying him up, as they probably had the ship's officers. Once outside, he was seized from behind, pushed toward the bow of the ship and bound securely, hand and foot. His new position of helplessness did not alarm him unduly. Once the thing was over, they would free him again.

The place to which the robbers had dragged him in the bow of the ship effectually hid him from those who were rushing about, engaged in their work of plunder. As he lay there, trying to find out from the confusion just what the plans of the pirates might be, two men disengaged themselves from the others and came towards him, conversing in the Cantonese dialect. Brooks started as he heard the voice of the smaller man who was in European clothes. This time there was no doubt about its being Dr. Ma.

'You are to see to it that you shed as little blood as possible,' Brooke heard him say to his companion, obviously the leader of the ruffians who were plundering the ship. 'They are very sensitive about it abroad and, besides, a bloody sowing will bring no luck. It is a stupid business that the Captain lost his life.'

'We could not help it,' growled the other, 'for he began to shoot at once like a wild devil. Besides, wherever you square a beam, you will have chips. My people are poor, hungry men who have no wish to kill. They would much rather earn their living as peasants, sailors or fishermen if there were enough bread. But do not let us deceive ourselves. I am acting by order of the Trias, who have never yet been afraid of blood.'

Brooke was aghast at the conversation. So the TAIAN work was already going forward! The devils had lost no time after their meeting in the Jade Mountain. He bent his attention to catching the next words of Dr. Ma, which were spoken in such a low tone that he could make nothing of them.

'Then please stop this talk,' broke in the robber suddenly, in a distinctly angry tone. 'I have no pleasure either in soiling my hands. But the chiefs of the Trias are cunning, relentless fellows. Their plan which I am carrying out has been well conceived. We aim especially at English ships. A short time ago I caught up three of their steamers in the delta below and sank them. And to-day we have this big boat. She too will disappear, leaving no trace, for there is plenty of water in the West River,' and Brooke heard the robber chuckle to himself as he contemplated the end of the Kwangsai.

Ma said something else which the American did not catch, apparently a question as to the rest of the programme of violence which the Trias were carrying out.

'Surely,' replied the robber affably. 'A few days ago I even paid a visit to an English gunboat. That was a good joke. She lay one night at the mouth of the North River not far from Samshui. I saw that all, except the guard on deck, were asleep. In the darkness we swam alongside without his noticing us, crawled up on deck and overpowered him before he was able to open his mouth. Then our boat floated quietly alongside and we fastened down the hatch leading to the crew's quarters. The foreign devils below were now in a rat-trap. I crept along to the cabin of an officer who was snoozing in his bunk. As the others were apparently off on shore, I had only to give him a sniff of chloroform to complete the job. That he should know who had visited him, I left

my card on the table. Then we might have started with the gunboat of the English King as our booty, but what could we have done with it? So I contented myself by taking the two guns, which we quickly dismounted. I should like to know what the Captain reported to Hongkong in explanation of his bad luck!'

Brooke heard the chief chuckle once more and, in spite of his painful position, he was obliged to smile, as he wondered to himself what his friend Lieutenant Roberts — for it must have been he, he reasoned — had reported to his Admiral.

As the two turned away, Brooke heard the robber say to Dr. Ma:

'We shall probably soon see the English helping our cause.'

As their voices died away in the noise of the ship, Brooke wondered what the meaning of the last words of the robber could be. Their obvious sense seemed quite incomprehensible to him, for it was beyond the realm of the possible that the English should be in any way leagued with the robbers. And for what purpose were the Trias, in their plan for a revolution, making use of the pirates? Here were indeed enigmas waiting for a solution.

A moment or two after Dr. Ma and the leader had disappeared Brooke saw several of the robbers coming directly toward him. He recognized one of the men in the light of the lantern he carried as having been in the trio that tied him up, while a second, a small alert fellow, seemed strangely familiar as well.

'Here lies the foreign devil,' said the bearer of the lantern, pointing to Brooke with his foot and giving him a kick at the same time. As he spoke, the light, which he had lifted above his head, thrust its rays across the face of the second member of the party. Brooke started with a fear that gripped his heart as he saw the red hair and recognized the face of the leader of the dance in Jade Mountain — the man who had entered his room in Kueilin just a few days before.

The leader of the robbers now joined the party.

'What has this fellow done?' he growled.

'This dirty foreign dog has profaned our holy rites through his loathsome presence,' answered the red-haired man. 'He has given affront to Kuan Ti, the God of War, and to the Jade Emperor, the highest of all divine beings. If the gods do not help our cause, then it is his doing. He has also heard things which the uninitiated may not know. He must die.'

'Yes, if that is so, then he must indeed die.'

Brooke's heart stopped, as he heard the robber chief pronounce his death sentence, and involuntarily struggled with his bonds. But the robbers had done their work so well that there seemed no chance of escape. He murmured a prayer as he felt the trio tying something heavy to his feet.

There was a moment of indecision among the robbers, as they lifted him to the rail — and that small second saved his life! With his heart pounding as though it would burst, he suddenly recognized, in the two people running toward his executioners and shouting at them, Alexandra and

Dr. Ma. It was the only time that Brooke had ever seen the Chinese exert himself, and in the flash of a second, as is sometimes the case in moments of extreme tension, the picture impressed itself ineradically upon his mind.

'Stop!' shouted Ma, as he came breathlessly up to the group. 'This foreigner is my friend. He has been of great service to me and therefore to our cause. He stands under my special protection.'

'The stranger knows the secrets of Jade Mount. He has been condemned to death by the Great One,' the red-haired man retorted passionately.

The words had a startling effect upon Ma. He drew back, then grasped the arm of Red-Hair.

'What do you mean?' he ejaculated.

An excited explanation by the leader of the dance of death followed and had an electrifying effect upon Dr. Ma. He turned to glare at Brooke with angry eyes, straightening himself shortly to a studied, frigid calm.

'Yes, if that is so, of course . . .'

Again there was a movement among Brooke's executioners, which the girl interrupted.

'For God's sake, what is the matter?' she demanded of Ma, having failed to understand the conversation which had been carried on in Cantonese. When Ma explained quickly the charge of the red-haired man against Brooke, the girl objected violently.

'No, Mr. Brooke has surely not wished to do anything underhand against us. He is too honest a man for that. It is certainly only by an unlucky chance that he has spied upon us.'

Brooke gave inward thanks for her timely support, but his hopes were immediately dashed again by the words of the cold-blooded, suave Chinese.

'It is possible that Mr. Brooke did not wish to spy upon us, but that does not alter his case. Any one who has become illegally acquainted with the secrets of the Jade Mount must die. Which would you prefer, Miss Goluboff, that this one man should die, or that our great movement should be in danger of betrayal?'

As Brooke's life hung in the balance, the girl pleaded with the Chinese, but to no avail, for he only looked at her unfeelingly and shook his head. There was a pause, during which Alexandra drew close to Ma and whispered a few words which Brooke could not catch. Their effect upon the Chinese was instantaneous. He started, looked surprisedly at the girl, then turned to the chief of the robbers.

'There has been a misunderstanding,' he said simply. 'Release the foreigner.'

The red-haired man jumped in front of Ma, gesticulating and threatening, swearing that the orders of the Great One must be obeyed. But it availed nothing, for the pirate leader took his orders from Ma and told his men to undo the ropes. The moment Brooke was free, he started toward Alexandra to thank her for saving his life, but the chief of the robbers stepped in his way.

'Your foreign Excellency, who are enjoying such high protection,' he said with a mocking laugh, 'climb down at once into that sampan. Do

not be afraid. They are decent people, and you will be carried without cost.'

Brooke hesitated for a moment, then broke past the robber's extended arm to seize Alexandra's hand and raise it to his lips.

'No, no,' she said in a low voice. 'I have saved your life, Stephen, but I do not understand all this. We shall meet again in Canton. Hurry!'

Brooke wanted to say a word to Dr. Ma, but the Chinese turned away angrily. This sent Brooke to the rail with a torrent of emotions surging within him, as he scrambled down the rope into the sampan which was lying alongside. While they were passing down his traveling-case, into which his things had been jammed, the red-haired man leaned over the rail to scream something to the boat crew, which Brooke did not understand. However, the robber chief laughingly interrupted him with:

'No, there will be no nonsense. You must answer to me for this gentleman's life.'

The *laodah* nodded obedience and shoved off into the swift current, which soon whirled Brooke out of sight of the Kwangsai, where he had so narrowly escaped death. The last fleeting glimpse he caught of any one on board revealed to him Alexandra, gazing anxiously in his direction. He waved his hand to her, but whether she saw him he did not know, for the picture quickly faded, as the steamer melted softly into the night.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONSUL OF CANTON

'B'LONG seven 'clock, Master.'

With these words Lai-fu, who had glided noiselessly into the room in his Chinese shoes, announced to the Consul-General that it was time to be about the day's business. Whitehead, in spite of his fifty-two years, was out of bed with one jump. It was a method which he had deduced, after a thorough trial, as being the only one that would assure his rising in time to be at his desk at the proper hour. If he stretched and yawned lazily while Lai-fu stood respectfully aside, the exertion of getting up became intolerable. But once up, with the deft Chinese ready to assist him with his toilet, the temptation of a further snooze was without too much difficulty overcome.

Whitehead was a big man physically. During his years in China, he had found tennis an effectual means of warding off the lazy habits of the Orient, and this form of relaxation had also served successfully to keep his large frame from acquiring too great a covering of fat. His strong, muscular shoulders, topped by a keenly alert face bronzed by exposure to the sun, marked him as a man in the prime of life with the fullest command of his faculties.

But this particular morning his brow was

clouded by worry. The Kwangsai was due from Wuchow, he remembered, and if that peculiar business at Kueilin had not kept him too long, Brooke would be on her. He had received no word from his subaltern during the month since his departure from Canton, but Whitehead felt reasonably sure that he would have taken passage on the Kwangsai. The reports of river pirates had been extremely disturbing of late. That story which they told at the club on Roberts and the theft of his two guns was amusing, but at the same time distressing; and it might be only a matter of days before the big river steamers would be pillaged just as the others had been.

He sighed as he began dressing leisurely after his bath, an echo, perhaps, of the melancholy fog concert of steamer whistles which floated in to him from across the river. Among the clear voices of the multitude of small steamboats that left Canton every morning between seven and eight to tow Chinese passenger junks to the many towns and villages in the ramified delta of the Pearl River, there were heard the deeper tones of the big steamers.

Whitehead paused for a moment to gaze through his window at the mist-shrouded harbor. Now and again a grumbling bass siren was audible, which he recognized as the voice of a steamer from Hongkong.

'Damn the fog,' he muttered, as he attempted to peer through the curtain which so effectually shut off the movements of the boats in the harbor. 'If I ever get out of this place . . .'

The Consul had held this post of chief at the principal office in South China for five years, and the monotony of it was beginning to pall upon him. When he accepted the appointment, he had been given glowing accounts of the distinction which attached itself to the position because of the complicated questions arising out of the frequent disorders in the surrounding region. But the 'distinction' had long since lost its charm. The disorders had turned out to be minor disturbances, and his duties had resolved themselves into the monotonous business of settling petty disputes. Recent rumors of the TAIAN movement had been the only break in the deadly routine of the office, and he had welcomed Brooke's departure for Kueilin as a possible diversion that would bring much of interest on his subaltern's return. Moreover, he had taken Brooke close to his heart in his own peculiar way during the past three years and was anxiously looking forward to seeing him again. Thinking of his return on the Kwangsai and of the report he would have to give on his journey brought back Whitehead's good humor.

Breakfast was promptly served by the clever Lai-fu, when the Consul-General came down to the comfortable dining-room. Lai-fu was a pearl of a servant, and the Cantonese cook, A-kee, prepared such delectable meals that Whitehead looked upon parting with him as the only possible sorrow that could come with leaving South China. Beside his plate lay the mail and the newspapers. While the Consul was eating, Lai-fu, who maintained the ceremony of the establishment, stood

in respectful silence diagonally behind his master, waiting for any sign, his head covered, after the official Chinese custom, with the regulation Mandarin servant's hat. He was dressed in a finely made blue silk gown reaching nearly to the ankles and partially covered by the sleeveless yellow silk jacket.

Whitehead glanced at his watch.

'Lai-fu, go topside, look-see that Kwangsai have come, no have come. Just now half-past eight and that Kwangsai must wanchee come already.'

The servant returned after a time.

'Plenty too much fog have got,' he said gravely. 'No can see ship-side. My have go next door, ask No. 1 Bank boy. He talkee steamer no have come.'

'Of course, the fog,' growled Whitehead. He hardly liked to think how much interest he had attached to the servant's report. There was no cause for worry, he reflected. The ship might be lying on a shoal waiting for the high tide to float her in. Still, it would do no harm for the servant to inquire further for news of her.

'You go talkee steamer agent's boy, b'long proper pidgin, Lai-fu. You savvy more better how fashion makee do.'

Lai-fu grinned, but his good education forbade him to recognize this joke which, according to Chinese ideas, was not quite legitimate. He had been long in the service of foreigners. His countrymen always said foreigners had no manners. But he knew that their manners were simply dif-

ferent, even if they seemed non-existent to a Chinese. He bowed his way out to consult with the agent's boy about the ship's arrival, while his master, finishing his breakfast and with difficulty controlling his impatience, sauntered into the consular offices, which were on the same floor with his quarters. He assured himself that, if the ship were lying off the harbor, it would be several hours before her arrival and in the interval he could work.

On his writing-table he found the usual cases, the smoothing out of which had become his chief business. He picked up the first report with a gesture of impatience. The missionary Hinkey in Kongmoon complained that his Chinese Christians were being molested by the officials.

'The spirit of persecution against the Christians still prevails,' wrote the missionary. 'Recently I baptized the ship's servant, Chong Mau. Three days later the district magistrate had him arrested on a charge of stealing. It is clear that the unhappy one was only imprisoned because he had become a Christian.'

'I'll bet a hat he stole,' growled Whitehead. He knew what the Chinese had to say about such cases and often found their versions quite plausible.

The next case on hand was no pleasanter. The firm, Hoffman and Sons, complained that the Chinese Hong, Tien Hai, had not yet paid for goods long since delivered and begged the Consul to make urgent representations to the magistrate of the Namhoi district.

Whitehead threw down the papers in disgust and rang the bell for one of his Chinese clerks.

'Here, what the devil's the meaning of this?' he shouted at the discomfited individual who appeared. 'I've told you a hundred times to take care of these affairs yourself and bring them to me only when they couldn't be settled otherwise.'

'But, sir,' said the clerk meekly, pointing to a notation upon the first sheet, 'this is the third report we have had. I thought you would want to know.'

'You thought I'd *want* to!' thundered Whitehead. 'You thought I'd want to mix up in these dirty, petty money-collecting affairs? We Consuls are money-collectors, nothing else — money-collectors. Might as well be a sheriff at home.'

'Yes, sir,' murmured the clerk respectfully.

'This is the third report, you say?' demanded Whitehead after a moment, picking up the papers again.

'Yes, sir, there have been two others,' replied the clerk. 'You will find them all there.'

'Oh, well, I suppose there is no way out of it then. Thanks,' he muttered as the clerk turned to go.

The hours passed with the Consul attempting to divert his mind from the possibility of an accident having happened to the ship by burying himself in the cases he detested. Lai-fu had contributed to his worry by reporting that the agent's boy had received no news of the Kwangsai. When it was twelve o'clock, with Brooke not yet arrived and no word from him, the chief decided to go to

the club. There he would meet Fielding, the English Commissioner of the Chinese Maritime Customs, who would have news about the ship sooner than any one else.

At the club everything was as usual, with the regular crowd of younger men around the bar, chatting and drinking the inevitable cocktails and whiskey-and-sodas. Some of the older men sat playing cards or dominoes, but Whitehead looked in vain for the Commissioner. It was said of him that, during all his twenty-six years in China, he had never taken tiffin without first visiting the club. He was sure to come, so Whitehead waited. After about ten minutes he appeared. The bull-dog face of the Englishman, at other times so jovially bright, to-day showed plainly lines of anxiety. Whitehead felt a catch in his throat as he saw his expression and, before he could reach Fielding, had his fears corroborated.

'Gentlemen,' he called out, displaying a telegram in his hand, 'very bad news. Another damnable pirates' trick! This telegram is just in from Samshui.' The hum of conversation in the room ceased, as the Englishman read the message:

> Kwangsai on way from Wuchow to Canton attacked yesterday at midnight below Suihing Gorges by pirates. Captain and foreign passengers probably killed.

Whitehead grasped Fielding's arm.

'My God, man, the Kwangsai! What does it mean?'

'The devil,' responded the Englishman calmly.

'Those rotten pirates again. If they've killed the foreigners there's bound to be a frightful mess. But why are you looking so white about it, old man? Some one you knew on board?'

'Brooke,' responded the Consul simply.

'Oh, I say, that's rum luck.' Fielding's voice was all sympathy. 'Take it easy, Whitehead. Remember, this hasn't been officially authenticated. This telegram is all we know. Brooke's a resourceful sort. He may have bolted somehow.'

The Consul sank weakly into a chair, as the momentary lull in the conversation was succeeded by the natural hubbub of voices raised in comment on the Commissioner's news. A note of sadness was struck by the thought that the Kwangsai's Captain, Wilson, might never drink with them again. He had been a regular frequenter of the club, and his unquenchable thirst had long been a standing joke among the members.

Whitehead took the whiskey-and-soda which the Commissioner placed at his elbow and began picturing his existence without the companionship afforded by Brooke. The more he thought of his subaltern, the more he was convinced of the truth of Fielding's words, that he was 'a resourceful fellow and might have bolted somehow.' He remembered the young man's statement just before he had set out.

'If ever I should fall into the hands of Chinese robbers, I would not think of shooting. That would certainly mean the end. You have to talk with those fellows. After all, they're only poor

devils without any wish to murder. Anybody with plain common sense could get around them.'

The thought cheered the chief and, striking his fist on the arm of his chair, he cried impulsively,

'No, Brooke's alive!'

He felt better after his drink and this decision and turned to join in the general conversation. Opinions were being exchanged. 'A country of robbers!' was all the younger men had to say with regard to the unsafe conditions.

'That's a bit strong,' reproved Fielding. 'The Chinese are an uncommonly orderly people. There are robbers all over the world and there are countries where the conditions are far worse than here in South China. I won't deny that the troubles caused by the pirates have been disquieting at times, but the inundation and the famine, which brought about much misery last year, explain a great deal.'

'There's been too much system in these things lately, though, to suit me,' muttered Whitehead, 'I don't like it.'

'Quite right,' agreed Fielding, turning to the American, 'and I fancy we'll find when this thing has been sifted down that the secret societies have had a hand in it. This word TAIAN passes from mouth to mouth all through the country. It has come to be a terror among the peaceful citizens and peasants. There is certainly something powerful behind it.'

'Why doesn't some one do something about it?' exclaimed Michael, a merchant, who was always excited. 'It is a nice state of affairs when a for-

eigner may not travel in China without running the risk of having his throat cut.'

'In your New York, where motorcar bandits are so abundant, you are not much safer,' objected Fielding derisively.

Knox, the master of the Hongkong steamer Sainam, forestalled the irritable Michael's retort.

'Why is nothing done against it?' he questioned rhetorically. 'Much is done against it and with good result, too. If the Kwangsai had made use of the precautionary measures recommended to all ships, I do not understand how the trick could have succeeded. I invented the method of defense myself after my own boat was plundered on a trip up from Hongkong. You see, the robbers don't approach the steamers in junks. Not they — they are far too clever. If they did, a gun or two would be sufficient to keep them at a respectful distance. No, they simply come on board as passengers either at Hongkong or Canton, or later at some of the stops on the West River.'

A general laugh greeted the Captain's statement.

'What's so funny about it?' he queried. 'Can you distinguish a robber from a peaceful passenger? I can't, I'm sure. When I was robbed, about a hundred people came on board at Canton as third-class passengers. All went along as usual till shortly before Linting. I was standing on the bridge when I saw three coolies, big strapping fellows, post themselves at the foot of the gangway armed with heavy bamboo sticks. I shouted to them to go down where they belonged, but they

only grinned and threatened me with their cudgels. Since I had left my revolver in my cabin, I was a prisoner on the bridge. In the same way the other officers were cornered. The terrorized Chinese crew was kept in check by the threats of the gang. In the cabins, in the holds, everywhere swarmed these third-class passengers who turned out to be robbers. One of the fellows who understood the engines cut off the steam and, as the ship stopped, a junk came alongside and the whole gang disappeared. When we reached Hongkong an hour later, we found that we were poorer by two hundred thousand taels of silver which we had been carrying as cargo.'

'And the method for defense?' asked Michael.

'It follows as a logical consequence. We have now had heavy iron grates put athwartship for'd of the third-class, and before them we station a Sikh, armed to the teeth. Then let the rascals play at robbers! They are in a cage, and, particularly if there's been any examination of their luggage on embarking, there isn't the slightest danger from them. If Wilson had done all this, I can't understand how his ship could have been plundered.'

'That's interesting — your method for defense,' observed Whitehead admiringly. 'But Wilson is no fool. The fellows must have followed another plan in this case.'

'Precisely,' agreed Fielding, 'since it is difficult to understand why the foreigners on board should have been killed. Of course, the telegram suggests only the probability of their death, but I

fancy, if the Captain or the engineer were still alive, the boat would have put in by now somewhere and I should have been the first to hear. God knows, I don't wish to be a bird of ill omen, but it does seem that we may fear the worst.'

Whitehead was silent for a moment. He felt his optimism regarding the safety of his assistant fast leaving him and had just decided that he would feel better in his own quarters, when there was a movement at the door.

'Brooke, old boy!' he heard some one shout, and in a second the Consul, with tears flooding his eyes, was pumping the hand of his assistant, slapping him on the back and calling for drinks at the same time.

'Are you all right?'

'Where's Captain Wilson?'

'How the devil did the filthy mess come about?'

'Where's the Kwangsai?'

'Got any wounds from the scrap?'

A dozen questions were fired at him from all sides of the group which closed in about the young man and his chief; but Brooke laughingly held up his hand for silence.

'One at a time,' he said, 'one at a time. And let me have a drink first. I haven't had a bite to eat.'

A glass was passed across the bar to him and, as he took it and his listeners eagerly waited for him to speak, he drained it deliberately and set it down.

'Ah-h,' he said, 'that's better.'

'But the scrap ——' some one insisted.

'Well, I'm all right, as you see,' said Brooke,

'but poor Wilson is dead — shot by a coolie on his own ship.'

'How was it possible?' began Captain Knox. 'Didn't he take the proper precautionary measures?'

'It was possible,' said Brooke, rather enjoying the dramatic tensity of the moment, 'because, in spite of the most carefully observed precautionary measures, the robbers had allies among the second- and even the first-class passengers.' A gesture of surprise went the rounds as the American continued: 'and there was a still more powerful ally, gentlemen — TAIAN.'

Something akin to a tremor of fear ran through the men who formed the circle about the speaker. It was the second time the mysterious word had been spoken within the hour, and all felt that something uncanny stood behind the two syllables which might bring disaster to others besides the passengers of the Kwangsai. Brooke took advantage of the moment to signal his chief that he did not wish to divulge more in the club. Whitehead understood and took him by the arm.

'I know that you will all excuse Brooke,' he said. 'You can see that he is tired and has not yet had tiffin. Give us time to freshen him up a bit and we'll be back to give you the story.'

'Oh, but I say!' objected one of the younger men.

Whitehead was obdurate, however, and, after assuring Fielding that he would tell him at the earliest possible moment all the details available, he led Brooke out of the club and down the street

to the Consulate. During the walk, he noticed the tired expression in the usually keenly alert face of the younger man. The grayish-blue eyes bore a dark, sunken expression, and there were deep circles below them. His face was pale, and his unshaven chin was evidence that his morning toilet had not been a careful one.

The room into which Whitehead led his friend when they arrived at the Consulate was next to the dining-room, where he ordered Lai-fu, whose grinning countenance bespoke his pleasure at the safe return of Brooke, to serve a sherry and bitters, while they waited for tiffin to be announced. It was a curious apartment, with its massive black-wood carved furniture — a big round table with curved legs, half a dozen heavy chairs with stiff backs and arms and a few round stools with stone seats, 'to keep people cool while waiting,' as the Consul used to remark. Along the walls were big and small glass cabinets on whose shelves reposed finely carved bits of ivory and other *bibelots*. Some tall, yellow church candles in high brass candelabra served for illumination.

But the strangest thing in the room was the curious array of idols, the collecting of which was Whitehead's sole hobby. It had become such a habit that he could not pass a shop in which there stood a Pusah, a Lohan, or any other grinning deity without at least bargaining for it. He was quite indifferent to the artistic features when purchasing. He bought them, no matter whether their size was heroic or as diminutive as that of a thimble; he bought them because all these things

were only curiosities to him. Their arrangement in the room violated every criterion of Chinese theology. Everything was in a perfect state of disorder; Buddhism, Taoism, and Lamaism went hand in hand. Here the dignified Goddess of Grace stood unconcernedly beside the very earthly looking, corpulent God of Wealth; here the Lord of Heaven seemed oblivious to the monkey, Husun, placed above him — the monkey which, once upon a time, armed with magic strength, had tried to seize upon the government of Heaven.

But to the eye of a foreigner, there was a certain style in it. There was taste in the arrangement of the bronze, earthen, and wooden figures which occupied the chimney-place, shelves, small side tables, or the floor of the room according to their stature and avoirdupois. Some of them even hovered in a mysterious way in the air.

'I have them all here,' Whitehead liked to joke; 'the gods and genii of Heaven, Hell, and Earth; of the mountains, the rivers, and the woods; the eight genii, the five elements, South, North, East, and West; dragons and ogres and all the saints and devils of luck and ill luck. What can ever happen to me with such an all-inclusive guard of tutelary spirits?'

Tired as he was, Brooke was forced to smile as he always did when he gazed around this strange sanctum of Whitehead's arranging. He glanced to the corner next to the balcony door, whence came the strangest and most uncanny effect of the room. It was produced by a carved dragon's head, the size of a man's and horribly painted,

mounted in such a way that it threateningly stared into the room with its projecting, disturbing eyes.

'Yes, he's still there, my boy,' laughed Whitehead, following the direction of his subaltern's gaze. 'He's my guardian angel, so Lai-fu tells me.'

As he spoke, the servant entered bearing the sherry and bitters. Anxious to get immediately to Brooke's story, the Consul ordered that tiffin be served to them in the room of the idols. Lai-fu spoke a word to the punkah-coolie on the balcony, who at once began pulling his string and started the great swaying fan over the heads of the two Americans in its soft, rhythmic motion.

'You are expecting from me a tale of piracy,' began Brooke, as he set his glass down on the side table; 'but what I experienced on the boat is only a link in a chain of events of such enormous importance that this steamer adventure loses its significance beside them. I have looked down into an abyss of the Chinese soul and I shudder as I think what I have seen revealed there.'

'Come, come, Brooke,' broke in Whitehead, 'don't talk riddles. Start at the beginning, from the time you left for Kueilin, and tell me what happened. Leave the souls for the end.'

The younger man smiled and once more began his tale. As it progressed, Lai-fu entered noiselessly and served tiffin, while Brooke wrapped the chief in the intense interest which he wove into the events of the past month. As he mentioned the name of Alexandra, Whitehead's eyes took on

a knowing expression, but he did not interrupt the current of the narrative. From time to time Lai-fu replenished the glasses, for it was after three o'clock before the interpreter had carried the tale to his enforced departure from the Kwangsai.

'Where did the rascally *laodah* take you?' he queried.

'Oh, we just cruised around for several hours,' replied Brooke. 'Toward morning I hailed a steamboat bound for Samshui, where I caught the train — and here I am.'

So strongly had the events of his story gripped him that he had forgotten the possible chance of his being overheard. Now he gazed about the room anxiously, and Whitehead, who had leaned back in his chair as the recital was brought to a close, was about to comment, when Brooke leaped to his feet.

'There is some one in the room!' he cried excitedly, as he dashed for the door that opened on the balcony. But he was too late. A nimble figure passed quickly before him and disappeared in a second over the railing. Brooke returned dejectedly after a few minutes.

'The fog has come up again, and I missed him,' he said. 'You can't see your hand before your face out there. I ran down to the Bund just in time to see a boat push off, and most likely it has taken the rascal to safety.'

'Good Lord!' blustered the Consul. 'The punkah-coolie's been right there all the time. How the devil did he get in? Here, Ma-ting, come in

here, my friend,' he ordered and, as Lai-fu hurried anxiously forward, Whitehead commanded: 'Ask this fellow how fashion.'

But the scared punkah-coolie was already down on his knees before them, kowtowing at every third word with such fervor that the occupants of the room could hear his head bump on the hard floor. He had tired of the pulling of the everlasting string, he explained, and the house-coolie, who had come to sit beside him, had offered to take his place for half an hour. When he, the punkah-coolie, had gone to the Bund to refresh himself a little at the river, another Chinese came and sat down on the bench beside him. They began to talk, and the stranger asked the usual polite questions about the punkah-coolie's occupation. Learning of his interesting position, the stranger had expressed the wish to see for once foreign excellencies in their own surroundings.

The punkah-coolie had taken the unknown guest with him up on the balcony, from where the stranger had crept into the room without his being able to stop him. This had happened after the house-coolie had gone away. Lai-fu asked the punkah-coolie how long the fellow had been in the room.

'About half an hour.'

'What sort of looking fellow was he?' demanded Brooke, addressing the trembling coolie in Chinese.

'I do not know, sir, except that . . .'

'Except what?' encouraged Brooke.

'. . . that he had red hair.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE HAND OF THE SECRET SOCIETIES

Consul-General Whitehead was not a man of quick resolution, but, once his mind was made up, he acted with combined firmness and expedition. A day passed by without his having proceeded further than to weigh carefully all the events of Brooke's journey to Kueilin. Their complicated nature and the possibility of entangling his country in a violation of the neutrality of China made it apparent that considerable care must be exercised in handling the extremely confidential disclosures which his subaltern had made.

Something must be done and at once to check the conspiracy of the Jade Mount, that much was apparent; but just what steps were to be taken, Whitehead himself was not ready to say. Better, he decided, as he sat in his office at the Consulate, if the whole thing were reported to his superiors and the responsibility placed where it belonged — not upon his shoulders. This was a matter which concerned all China — not the single portion of it over which he had jurisdiction as Consul of Canton. News of the impending revolution should reach Washington with the least possible delay. That meant a cable, and the nearest one that could be trusted was at Shanghai, where an all-American service would obviate the possibility of spies in the Chinese offices intercepting the message and thus learning that

steps were being taken to frustrate their plans.

That would mean, too, that a messenger must go north, since the telegram could not be safely transmitted over the Chinese wires. After considerable deliberation, Whitehead decided that Brooke would be the best man to send. In Shanghai he could write the report himself, so that, if he were robbed on the way from Canton, no incriminating papers would be found on his person. Then he could continue on north to Peking to inform the American Minister.

His decision once reached, another problem presented itself — that of taking into his confidence the Governor-General of the Province of Kwangtung, General Tang Fu-lu. The Consul frowned as he turned the matter over in his mind. Several occasions had presented themselves for his observance of this ranking Chinese official, and none of them was calculated to create confidence in his actions. His past was also far from inspiring. Since the fall of the dynasty the new Government had not succeeded in establishing public discipline throughout the country. Even the upper dignitaries were in the habit of changing their political affiliations and allegiance just as seemed most opportune and profitable to them, and Whitehead was not at all sure that the General by grace of Peking to-day might not prefer to be a TAIAN Governor-General to-morrow if the change seemed a propitious one. So he discarded the possibility of provincial action and decided to work only through the Central Government at Peking.

Throughout it all the possible danger to Brooke was the real concern of the older man; but he reasoned that, since he had once been dragged into this wasp's nest of the secret societies, he was little safer in the international settlement of Canton than he would be in Shanghai or Peking. No, the only real risk of miscarriage in their plans seemed to come from the possibility that Brooke's love for the Russian girl might lead him into a too great regard for her safety and so spoil the rounding-up of the conspirators.

'Damn these women!' muttered Whitehead. 'Always the fly in the ointment! And Brooke — why the devil, when he has kept away from them this long, must he fall in love with one who is a Russian Communist, a conspirator in a plot to set all China ablaze!'

He shook his head in disgust. His fifty-two years of bachelorhood had left him with a distrust of women in general, a feeling he found concentrating in a growing hatred of Alexandra Goluboff in particular. She was thrice cursed according to his lights: first, as a woman, then as a revolutionary and, lastly, as Brooke's inconceivable sweetheart.

Whitehead turned in annoyance from the insoluble problem of why his subaltern, after thirty years of safety, should have fallen victim to the dangers of love, to summon him and place before him the result of his deliberations. But Lai-fu, who had been dispatched with the message, returned to report the interpreter engaged.

'Master Blooke just now have got Chinese

guest that side,' he reported in his quaint English. 'He come byme-by.'

As it was a daily occurrence for Brooke to receive Chinese visitors, Whitehead thought nothing of it. Neither had Brooke sensed anything unusual in the announcement a few minutes before that the chief secretary of the district magistrate of Namhoi was outside and wished to speak to him.

But his casual glance was turned to one of lively interest a moment later when he beheld in the countenance of the chief secretary the imperturbable face of Dr. Ma. He recovered his composure, as his erstwhile companion came toward him, with not the slightest suggestion of the animosity he had shown on board the Kwangsai, to say smilingly:

'Excuse the trick, but after all that has happened, I was afraid of encountering difficulties if I gave my name. You are surprised to see me?'

'Rather,' returned Brooke dryly. 'I hardly thought that you would have much desire to see me again after all that has happened.'

'On the contrary,' said the Chinese with a gesture. 'Though I regret exceedingly the chance that enabled you to hear the reports delivered at the meeting, I am convinced that it was through no desire of your own that you were present.' He waited for the American to make some comment and, as he remained silent, continued: 'But you must realize from the scene on the ship that the White Lotos and the Trias are hardly willing to

be so charitable. Believe me, Mr. Brooke, they are fearful enemies.'

'So I have heard,' replied Brooke easily, wondering what lay behind that mask of a face.

'Miss Goluboff,' the Chinese went on, and Brooke thought he caught a slight tremor in his voice as he mentioned her name, 'sent me to warn you of your danger, though I should have come myself had she not spoken of it. We are political enemies, Mr. Brooke, but that need not affect our personal relations. You have rendered a great service to me and to our cause in taking us on your boat, after our own had been shipwrecked on the Fu. For this, I am deeply grateful to you, and it is as an expression of that gratitude that I come to warn you.'

'Against what?' questioned Brooke curiously.

'One word,' said the Chinese dramatically, 'is sufficient to surround you with murderers on all your ways, to threaten you even in your home, and that word has already been pronounced. If you do not leave this country at once by a safe road, you can count yourself among your ancestors.'

Brooke lifted his eyebrows slightly; then he answered calmly:

'You may inform your friends, Ma, that they will find me in my usual haunts. I am perfectly safe. The Government officials are responsible for my person.'

The Chinese laughed derisively.

'The officials are only weak playthings in the hands of the societies that seek your death. If any

one can save you, it is the political organization of the Revolutionary Party to which I belong. Our arm, too, is powerful. We condemn the methods of the secret societies and it is only in the interest of the higher cause that we have joined with them for the moment. We fight with political weapons. We do not wish to commit murder or to mix with murderers. Therefore, it quite harmonizes with the principles of my organization if I not only warn you, but if I also offer assistance to prevent a murder which would in itself expose our cause in a most dangerous way.'

'And how will your society prevent these allies of yours from making away with me? Surely, if I have been condemned to death by such high authority, the question of your friendship will not keep me from their vengeance.'

'That is true,' agreed Dr. Ma, 'but I can take you to a safe hiding-place where your life will be guarded by trustworthy men.'

It was Brooke's turn to laugh.

'Excuse me, my friend. I do not wish to appear ungrateful for the safety which you offer me, but you are so obvious.'

'Obvious?' repeated the Chinese. 'I am afraid that I do not understand.'

'Oh, yes, you do,' said Brooke. His tone changed suddenly, as he leaned forward to continue sharply: 'I do thank you for your solicitation, Dr. Ma. I believe you when you say that you do not wish my death. But you have not been quite frank. This hiding-place of yours would be little more than a prison. You would take care

that I should not be injured, but would see to it that I did not go outside it. Am I right?'

Baffled, the Chinese smiled.

'No, my friend,' Brooke went on, 'to agree to such a plan would not only be foolhardy, it would be cowardly as well.'

Lai-fu entered the room for the second time at this juncture.

'Consul-General ask Master Blooke come, s'pose only litty time,' he said.

'All right, Lai-fu, you talkee Consul-General my come chop-chop,' replied Brooke, and, turning to his visitor, apologized: 'I am sorry we have been so interrupted and I hope you won't think me rude for breaking off our talk so unceremoniously. I feel this is very impolite after the concern you have shown for my welfare.'

The Chinese had evidently not finished his mission and felt the gibe in Brooke's last words. But even his foreign life had not brought him sufficient disregard of Chinese etiquette to refuse to drink his tea, as his host took the ceremonial sip from his own cup. Brooke was rather enjoying this entirely polite method of throwing his disagreeable traveling companion through the door, even to the final ceremonial bow at the outer entrance. But after it was all over and the American had thought Ma out of his life forever, the latter, before entering his sedan-chair, turned and very courteously said:

'Miss Goluboff asked me to bring you her regards and to express the hope that she might see you in the near future.'

On the point of replying, Brooke hesitated, then simply bowed his thanks as he waited for his guest's chair to start. His heart had leaped at the mention of the girl's name, so that he had to compose himself as he turned back into the office to consult his chief's wishes.

Whitehead was not long in getting to the point. He explained the plan he had evolved, whose most important detail was that Brooke was to sail by the very first boat for Shanghai, which Lai-fu had found out was the Fenghui of the China Merchants' Line, leaving the following morning. The interpreter listened silently, as the Consul outlined his plans, only nodding assent here and there. No report was to be written, Whitehead explained, to guard against accidents; but they would together go over the details to be included, so that Brooke could make up his own report intelligently in Shanghai.

'I hate to lose you again, my boy,' he said affectionately in conclusion; 'but it seems to be the best way out of the difficulty.'

'Yes, and I shall hate to leave you too, sir, but it won't be for long this time.'

The young man left the Consul to clear off the matters which still remained on his desk. That night he arranged his effects and packed another traveling-case; but somehow he felt an intangible check was being applied to his joy at getting away, even to Peking. By evening it had sufficiently clarified itself to be apparent to Brooke that it was the thought of leaving Alexandra behind that was troubling him. She had hoped they

would meet again, Ma had said; and now he was going north to be away, possibly, for a fortnight or more.

Try as he would, he could not feel toward the girl the animosity which he knew her political beliefs and avowed affiliations deserved. She had admitted that she loved him, and he knew now that, for the first time in his life, he really loved. To be leaving the object of his affections in the hands of an idiot father and a band of brigands in the midst of the filth and steam of Canton was well-nigh unbearable. He sat for hours at his window, smoking pipe after pipe and gazing across the mist-covered harbor. Finally a troubled sleep brought no assuagement to his keen regret, and the morning found him in almost physical pain at the thought of leaving the girl.

Whitehead was already at breakfast, when he came down.

'Here, Brooke, old boy, read this,' he thundered, as the younger man, his face pale and drawn from the almost sleepless night, joined him.

Brooke took the telegram and read it aloud:

> Burden transferred from Peking. Consul-General Whitehead to assume charge of the Legation as soon as Consul Graham arrives from Swatow as relief.

'Good going! Congratulations,' Brooke enthusiastically exclaimed.

'Thunder and lightning!' was the Consul's joyous response. 'Released at last out from this musty prison. Peking and in charge of the Legation! A

big job, but we shall have to see that it is properly done. How about it, Lai-fu? I congratulate you, old fellow! As No. 1 boy of the American Chargé d'Affaires, you will be a great man.'

Lai-fu grinned for pleasure over his whole face and, after the fashion of the Manchu, made a solemn *ch'ing-an*, that is, bent the right knee to the ground and dropped his right hand beside it.

'Master wanchee Lai-fu pack chop-chop go all same time Master Blooke Fenghui?'

Brooke and the Consul laughed at Lai-fu's enthusiasm.

'No,' said Whitehead, 'we must travel more slowly. We have to wait for our successor. You will have to be patient for a week longer.'

'This is excellent news, sir,' said Brooke, when the servant had departed. 'It means that we shall be together soon in Peking.'

'Yes,' replied the Consul rather ruefully, 'and it means, too, that I shall have all this TAIAN business to take care of myself.'

'No one could handle it more carefully,' said Brooke warmly. 'It will be a feather in your cap if you can break up the plot of the secret societies.'

'I shall owe it all to you, Brooke, my boy,' said Whitehead, placing an affectionate hand on his subordinate's shoulder. 'I don't know what I should do without you.'

Brooke was silent, while the Consul, to cover his own emotion, went into the adjoining room

under the pretense of assuring himself that Lai-fu had attended to all the details of Brooke's departure.

He had ordered the Consulate gig to be at the Bund to see Brooke safely on board the Fenghui, but when the two of them arrived half an hour later, the gig was not there. Whitehead stormed and sputtered, while Lai-fu, more quietly but quite as firmly, called down all the curses of the seven hells on the ancestors of the boatmen. But, since they were nowhere to be found, Brooke and his dunnage had to be stowed in a wiggling little sampan and run off to the steamer a few hundred yards away. Whitehead followed the small, covered boat with his eyes until he saw Brooke safely up the gangway.

Owing to the delay over the gig, he had arrived not a moment too soon, for he had hardly more than put his foot on board when the whistle blew, the screw began to churn the muddy water, and the steamer started to move slowly off. After a wave of the hand from Brooke, Whitehead turned back to the Consulate, satisfied that his emissary was safely on his journey without its being known to any one, not even his intimate friends at the club. The details of engaging passage had been arranged with such secrecy that Whitehead congratulated himself on the way in which his subaltern's departure had been accomplished.

Back at the Consulate, he had hardly entered the high portal before he heard the enraged voice of Lai-fu. The latter was tongue-lashing a coolie, but all the oaths of Canton he was uttering

seemed to make no impression on the refractory one.

'What thing, Lai-fu?' shouted Whitehead. 'How fashion all this bobbery? What side all your No. 1 manners?'

'My savee, my no b'long ploper,' answered the enraged servant, 'but all coolies b'long all same dirty turtle eggs. Any man wanchee go 'way; no man wanchee stop this side.'

'The hell they don't!' exploded Whitehead. 'What's the matter with them? Why don't you keep better discipline?'

'No b'long my fault, Master,' assured Lai-fu. 'First, gig-coolie no come Bund-side; then punkah-coolie makee run away; gate-coolie, office-coolie, kitchen-coolie, sedan-coolie, all same. Just now house-coolie too b'long mad. When I askee what thing, he talkee plenty fool pidgin, have got plenty too much fear. Coolie guild talkee every man must wanchee leave Master; any man stoppee this side must wanchee die. Plenty bad man makee all this bobbery pidgin.'

Lai-fu was for continuing with his lamentations and scoldings, but Whitehead, who had quickly grasped the situation, comforted him.

'Never mind, old boy, you and I will be able to carry on alone. The coolies will come back without being called. And Lai-fu, you talkee any man Master Brooke just now go back America side, you savvy? This place had got too hot for him.'

'My savee,' answered Lai-fu.

'They'll stop their nonsense when they hear that Brooke has gone back to America,' growled

Whitehead, as he went to his study. 'I ought to have thought of that before.'

A ring at the door was followed by Lai-fu's entrance, announcing that a Chinese wished to speak personally with the Consul-General on urgent business. The visitor was able to speak English and therefore no interpreter was required. As Lai-fu stepped back to motion to him, a young, delicately built Chinese entered. According to the approved rules of politeness, he took off his spectacles as he bowed, but, contrary to the best Chinese etiquette, he did not waste any time over the usual formalities of conversation. He came excitedly to the point at once.

'Your interpreter, Mr. Brooke, is in the most fearful danger. You must save him immediately,' came in fluent English from him.

'And who are you?' demanded Whitehead with even less of ceremony.

'I am a friend of Li Hang-po from Kueilin,' he replied. 'Strict orders have been given to the members of some of the most powerful secret societies to kill Mr. Brooke wherever he may show himself. An accurate description has been sent out by the chiefs of the societies, so that every one may recognize him.'

'Good God!' ejaculated the Consul, awed, in spite of himself, by the other's words. 'They don't waste much time, do they? But all is well, my friend, for Mr. Brooke left here to-day.'

The young Chinese stepped closer to the Consul.

'He has gone?' he exclaimed. 'Where?'

From the beginning the visitor had made so trustworthy an impression upon Whitehead that, especially after hearing the name of Li Hang-po, the Consul felt there was no danger in revealing Brooke's true whereabouts.

'He has left for Shanghai.'

The visitor's excitement became more pronounced.

'By what ship?' he demanded tensely.

'The Fenghui — but what is the matter with you?'

The young Chinese turned pale as, disregarding all criteria of Chinese etiquette, he sank into a chair.

'Quick, quick, you must save him!' he gasped. 'The Captain of the Fenghui is a member of the Revolutionary Party and of the secret societies.'

'Which means . . .' began Whitehead.

'TAIAN,' finished the Chinese, nodding his head.

CHAPTER IX

THE COURIER OF REVOLUTION

After his chief had turned back from the Bund, Brooke left the rail to inspect the cabin where the steward had stowed his luggage. As everything was in order, he simply removed a few necessaries from his traveling-kit and returned to the deck. He was greeted by the Chinese Captain from the bridge in a friendly manner and, as he strolled around the promenade deck, he seemed everywhere to be treated with unusually marked politeness. He had hardly seated himself in a rattan deck-chair before a Chinese steward was at his elbow, inquiring if he wished to take some refreshment.

The steamer was not going out through the main branch of the Pearl River, so familiar to Brooke, but through the so-called Back Reach. There at the right lay the white buildings of one of the foreign missions; at the left, on the side toward the island of Honam, were the great godowns of the foreign commercial firms. Now and again the whistle roared warningly, ordering some junk or sampan out of the channel. The ship passed slowly by Whampoa with its pointed pagoda, the place where many years ago the Europeans were first forced to live, before they were granted the right of residence in Canton. From the northwest, the White Cloud Mountains gave

a rugged background to the picture spread before the eyes of the traveler.

He lounged back in his deck-chair, with his gaze playing moodily over the distant hills, musing over the unique character of his mission. There was an oppressiveness in the air which he could not definitely catalogue, unable as he was to decide whether it was atmospheric or mental. The events of his departure from Canton had been so rapid that he had hardly had time to review them quietly; but, now that he had been granted leisure for contemplation, he began to question the wisdom of having taken passage on an exclusively Chinese steamer. Times were troublous, indeed, so troublous that, after Dr. Ma's warning, he reasoned, despite his natural aversion to fear, that considerable caution was necessary. Yet here he had put himself entirely at the mercy of the Chinese with what seemed almost deliberate intention. He glanced nervously about him and then, chiding himself for his uneasiness, filled his pipe and settled back to the enjoyment of his surroundings.

But the mental depression was not to be 'smoked out' so easily. Thoughts of Alexandra Goluboff left behind in Canton, surely in the greatest danger of arrest if not of positive injury, kept recurring so persistently that he cursed himself for having made no attempt to search her out to try to dissuade her from her foolhardy conspiracy; but he smiled with unfeigned satisfaction, as he thought of the neat way in which he had rid himself of Dr. Ma the day before. He

found that he had developed a positive loathing for this individual, motivated by a feeling more deeply seated than any objection to his political affiliations. He could not explain it himself, but he felt instinctively, by one of those natural intuitions which often seem groundless, that he and Ma could never be anything but enemies.

As he mused, a figure stepped quietly to his side.

'I am glad that you have decided to put yourself under my protection,' said a familiar voice; and Brooke glanced up quickly to see the object of his thoughts looking down at him, a slightly sardonic smile twitching the corners of his mouth.

'You?' ejaculated the American in amazement; then, quickly covering his embarrassment with a laugh, went on: 'If I am under any one's protection, Ma, it is that of the China Merchants' Company and of the Chinese Government.'

But, as he spoke, his earlier fears recurred to him and were justified by the Doctor's next words.

'You are absolutely right in part, but in the main quite mistaken,' he answered with disturbing oiliness, as he seated himself beside Brooke. 'The China Merchants' Company has put itself as well as all its ships at the disposal of the Revolutionary Party.' Then his voice grew sharper and more tense as he continued: 'We are on the eve of a great revolution. The die is cast. I am the representative of the Revolutionary Government which will be shortly, if Heaven allows it, the only lawful government in China.'

In disgust and anger Brooke broke in:

'Why, damn it, Ma, you . . .'

'Do not get excited,' the Chinese in turn interrupted. 'You are a man of perception, Mr. Brooke. Please realize your own position and mine. You have come to know some weighty secrets, the keeping of which in absolute confidence is of the greatest importance to my party.'

'And the revealing of which —' interjected the American hotly, only to be interrupted before he could finish by Ma's comment:

'From your point of view, perhaps. The ethics of the situation we can leave undiscussed. The only point of importance now is that you are my prisoner of war. Oh, it is done in your own interest, Mr. Brooke,' he went on, as his adversary started slightly. 'If you were to travel unprotected, you would fall into the hands of murderers even before reaching Shanghai.'

Brooke was sulkily silent. He was furious with himself for having made it so easy for this 'guest,' whom he had less than twenty-four hours before figuratively kicked out of his office, to enjoy his complacent revenge so soon and so thoroughly. He might have known after the punkah-coolie incident, he reflected, that Ma in all probability had a brother as the office *t'ing-ch'ai* in the Consulate or some one else as absurdly intimate with the household affairs to spy on all their movements. Brooke nearly laughed to himself as he recalled his earlier thought that atmospheric conditions had had something to do with his state of nervous tension.

'Well, what do you want to do with me?' he snapped at his captor.

'It is quite simple,' was the polite answer of the revolutionary. 'The Fenghui will proceed directly to Shanghai without putting in at either Hongkong or Swatow. South of Amoy is a small island well out at sea where we shall leave you. Everything will be made as comfortable as possible for you, but our adherents will take care that you do not leave the place without our permission.'

'Prisoner of war, eh?' muttered Brooke.

'Precisely,' returned the Chinese. 'I am sorry, Mr. Brooke, to have to detain you in this manner, but, quite frankly, it is the only way of saving your life, which you so foolishly seem ready to throw away. Both Miss Goluboff and I should never forgive ourselves, if harm came to you.'

'Miss Goluboff!' ejaculated Brooke, turning to his opponent. 'So she is in on this, too?'

'She entirely concurs in the decision,' said Ma, 'though, with me, she regrets the necessity for it. Doubtless you will soon learn from her the arrangements which have been made for your entertainment during this temporary internment.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Brooke. 'Is Alex . . . is Miss Goluboff on the Fenghui?'

'You will see her at tiffin,' replied the Chinese, as he rose and left the American to contemplate the fate which awaited him.

Brooke did not move. Instead, he sat musing over the sudden turn of affairs. Prominent in his mind was a dull resentment which he found grow-

ing against Alexandra for lending herself to such a plan. True, he reasoned, she was working for his own good as she saw it. She and Ma — he hated the thought of coupling their names — might really be playing a straight game with him, though the latter's suavity was in no way lessening the exasperation of it. The girl, through some strange turn of fate, had thrown herself heart and soul into this revolutionary movement. He had seen that she was able to put it before love. She knew that he would do his utmost to frustrate the plans of the Revolutionary Party, and so, ruthlessly casting aside her love for him, she had submitted to, even assisted in, a plan which would mean his sojourning on a lonely island far from the scene of action until the *coup d'état* being organized by the brigands of the Jade Mount should have succeeded.

Gradually the resentment in his mind turned to anger against the girl whom he knew he loved, until, when midday came and the ship had already left the Bocca Tigris far behind, he had convinced himself that caring for her was impossible. Meanwhile he would watch his chance to elude an imprisonment which seemed for the moment inevitable.

'We can't possibly reach the island for two days,' he reflected, 'and in that time much can happen.'

The Fenghui was now at the mouth of the river. Ahead stretched the blue sea, already so rough that the ship began to pitch a bit, as she encountered the oncoming waves. A gong gave the

call for tiffin, and Brooke, though his churned-up mental state left him little enthusiasm for food, went along to the dining-saloon just as a matter of playing the game, if nothing more. Knowing that he would have to face Ma at the table, he roundly cursed the whole system of suave Chinese manners which he would have to observe, quite oblivious of the employment he had made of them the afternoon before.

He was on his guard against the meeting with Alexandra, which he felt sure would take place there. The thought of it galled him. If she had only had the decency to seek him out on deck before tiffin, the embarrassment of an encounter in this public place might have been avoided; but he told himself, as he rebelliously followed the No. 1 boy to his place, that actually he didn't care. He would be polite to her, nothing more. She would see how he felt about those plans of hers!

So engrossed was he in these thoughts that he hardly noticed where he was going until he passed the wooden post near the seats on the Captain's right. Glancing up to be decently polite to the skipper, he caught sight of the repulsive face and head of Goluboff in the second seat to the left of the Captain. He gave a visible start when he found, added to this, that his hand was almost on the back of the chair framing the head and shoulders which had somehow come to have an electric ability to thrill him.

He paused for a moment, undecided, before his resentment and deep displeasure surged up once more. With perfunctory nods, he acknowledged

the greetings of all the men at the table and turned last to Alexandra Goluboff, whose smile of welcome he answered with an abrupt and formal bow that was little short of rudeness. Then he seated himself and began to eat in silence.

The company of travelers was small. Brooke and the girl sat on either side of the Captain at the head of the table. Then came old Goluboff and Dr. Ma, while a few Chinese merchants on their way to Shanghai made up the remainder of the company. The general feeling was distinctly one of depression. The nervously swaying punkas kept the sultry air stirring, but the conversation dragged in spite of all the efforts of Alexandra, who did her best to enliven the situation.

Brooke had an excellent opportunity for observing the girl, as she skillfully attempted to carry the talk into interesting channels. In her simple white gown she looked so young, so entirely feminine, that he found himself blinking at the thought that this slip of a girl could be the dangerous revolutionary he knew she was. He was unquestionably melting before the obvious charm of her manner and, as her eyes met his in an open appeal, he steeled himself, gazed at her stolidly for a moment and turned away, for fear of betraying the emotion which lurked under his resentment.

Only once did the conversation lift itself from its desultory character to attract the interest of the entire company. Alexandra had pointed to a Chinese picture hanging at the forward end of the saloon over a kind of altar. It showed the figure of a woman walking on the waves, with her

ample garment slightly rippled by the wind, and behind her, only half visible, a maidservant with a fan.

'What is the subject?' the girl asked.

'That is Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Grace, who protects the travelers,' Dr. Ma explained learnedly, only to be corrected by the laconic Chinese Captain.

'Pardon, sir, that is not Kuan Yin. It is the Holy Mother, the Empress of Heaven. Since ancient times the Chinese mariners have always looked to her as their protecting goddess.'

'And you believe in her ability to protect you?' Alexandra continued.

'My crew all hold to the superstition,' laughed the Captain, 'so to please them I put up the picture here in the saloon. Anyhow, it is a decoration for the wall,' he finished, as if to excuse his humoring of the men.

There was a pause which no one seemed ready to fill, and finally the Captain rose from his seat. The others followed, but, when Brooke stepped aside to allow Alexandra to pass through the door, she hesitated and waited until every one had left the dining-saloon, pretending to busy herself with a small bag which she carried. As Brooke was about to ignore her and go out on deck, she placed a hand on his arm. The American glanced back at her, a frown crossing his face.

'You . . . you have had a talk with Dr. Ma which has caused you annoyance?' she said with a rising inflection in her voice which suggested that she was feeling her ground.

'Annoyance?' Brooke's voice was charged with sarcasm. 'A stronger word might be better, Miss Goluboff.'

'Since when have I been anything but Alexandra to you?' questioned the girl.

Brooke could sense the pleading in her tone, but chose to ignore it. 'Since you have proved that you no longer wish me to call you by that name,' he retorted sharply.

'Stephen,' she said reproachfully, 'you are unjust.'

'You talk of justice easily,' the man continued, biting off his words. 'The simpleton has walked into the net, and doubtless you are all to be congratulated. But let me warn you, if the simpleton is no simpleton, he may know how to free himself.'

He turned and was about to go, but the pressure on his arm increased.

'Please wait,' she protested in a low, trembling voice. 'Believe me, Stephen, this is the only way you can be saved from the awful dangers which surround you. You do not realize . . .'

'That's what Ma said,' broke in Brooke angrily, 'but I'm willing to take my chances with any damned revolutionary.'

The girl winced at the term.

'I am one of "the damned revolutionaries," as you call them,' she retorted proudly, even defiantly. 'I believe in the revolutionary cause with all my heart, but yet,' she continued, her voice soft and tender once more, 'I should never like to hurt you because of it.'

Despite the appeal in her last words, Brooke continued in his anger.

'The "revolutionary cause"! That's what I hate in you. How any woman can willingly mix herself in revolutions and all the horrors that go with them is beyond comprehension. When I came to know you on the Fu I liked you. It went even further than thinking of you as only a friend — you know that. But since I have seen how deeply entangled you are in intrigues with men who are nothing but criminals, I cannot go on. I wanted to help you, but — oh, what's the use?'

There was an echo of despair in the words, in which the girl sensed the breaking down of his reserve.

'Please, Stephen,' she said softly, 'listen to me. Won't you?'

'Go on,' he said rather grimly, and seated himself beside her in the Captain's chair.

'You ask me how a woman can have anything to do with revolutions,' she began slowly, feeling about for a point on which to open her story. 'It has been a growth, mounting to a conviction which has come to be almost a religion with me.'

Brooke stirred uneasily in his chair, and she continued hastily.

'You hear me say "Father" to an old man whose mind is confused. Michael Goluboff is not my real father, but he has been as much to me as any parent could have been. My own father held a very high post under the Tsar's régime for many years. His name does not matter to you. If you had known the old Russia, you would have known

it. He served the Tsar loyally after the ideas of the old school; but he had his enemies, who sought to remove him and the barrier he created between them and political advancement.

'One day — I was a child, but I remember it still — soldiers came and took him away. My nurse told me that he was accused of treason. I never saw him again. His enemies had conspired well, bringing witnesses and evidence sufficient to send him into far-off Siberia. His very honesty defeated him, for he would attempt no defense.'

She paused for a moment, and Brooke felt his anger giving way to a sympathetic, almost fighting interest in the girl's story.

'My mother died soon after my birth,' she continued, 'so that, following my father's death, I had no one to whom to turn. With his wealth confiscated, I had nothing left me. What my fate would have been I hardly know, if Michael Goluboff, who was the doctor in our small native town, had not taken care of me. Even then people thought him a bit queer. He hated the old Russian world with a fanatical anger and used my own tragic case to illustrate the horrors of the Tsarist régime. At that time he still had full possession of an uncommonly sharp intellect and, as my adopted father, he was good, very good to me. He taught me his views about political matters, and I, owing him so much, was a docile pupil. Later on, it sometimes occurred to me that perhaps his goodness was prompted not so much by philanthropy as by hatred for the governing class, feeling that there would be a certain re-

venge in moulding the descendant of an old royalist family into a revolutionary. But, even if that was his motive, I cannot be angry with him. He was inexpressibly good to me, and for this I owe him my gratitude.'

'You poor girl,' murmured Brooke, pressing the hand which lay on the table next to his own.

'The Revolution came then,' she went on after a pause, 'and my adopted father suddenly saw all barriers go down. The way to the constructive work he had dreamed of all his life was open. But he, who had hated almost to exhaustion, could not love. When there was nothing more for his mind to bore at, to pierce, to dig up, his senses, till now strained to the utmost in the struggle, became dull. Michael Goluboff, the great revolutionary pioneer, had arrived at the end of his career — he had become an idiot.' She paused for a moment, and the hand which lay in his closed convulsively. 'Oh, Stephen,' she said, the pity in her eyes melting him, 'I know that you hate him, but you do not know how fine, how good he was. You cannot see it all as I do. I remember everything he did for me and I can see in his life only the terrible tragedy.'

Brooke was obsessed by a strong, surging impulse to comfort her, to share the load with her, but could not find words for his thoughts. He waited in silence for her to go on.

'It is queer,' she mused, 'but unconsciously his instincts still work with all their old vigor. You cannot keep up a logical conversation with him, but he seems to sense it, when dangers threaten

the Cause. It is for this reason that the Revolutionary Committee at Chita insisted that he accompany me on my mission here.'

'Did he guess that I would prove an enemy of the Revolution?' questioned Brooke curiously.

'Immediately,' replied the girl. 'Do you remember that first night we were together on your house-boat — when the three of us left you alone in your cabin?'

'Yes, indeed, you sat talking together for an hour or two.'

'He was warning us then that we should meet danger through you. Of course, Dr. Ma and I both laughed, but you see he was right.' Their eyes met for a moment, but in Alexandra's glance there was none of the hatred which one feels for an enemy. Rather, there was ineffable sadness and tenderness, mingled with a woman's love that no duty or conviction could efface.

'What did you do when your fa . . . when Mr. Goluboff lost his reason?'

The girl sighed as she picked up the thread of the narrative.

'I was placed in a revolutionary seminary. I was very young and, with the other children, was treated with the greatest tenderness and care. You see they are not bad psychologists, Stephen, and they did their work well. We were taught what the Revolution was aiming at, so carefully, so naturally that it became part of our flesh and blood. If the whole of humanity were treated as we children were, then the world would be really good. This became the goal toward which we

were striving. To teach the world goodness, yes, almost primitive goodness, has become a holy duty to all of us.'

'But, Alexandra . . .' interjected Stephen. The girl stopped him.

'I know what you are going to say — the horrors.' She sighed. 'All of us deplore them — but it is the only way. Some day, you see, if we do our work well, all that will be over, and the world will be so many, many times better for having lived through it. Don't you see, Stephen?' she pleaded. 'Don't you understand now why I am doing what you say no real woman could do?'

'Yes,' said Brooke slowly, 'I see how you have been deluded into believing that you are engaged in a great humanitarian work for the ultimate good of the world. But you need a friend, a genuine friend. Michael Goluboff, although good to you, has not been such a friend, any more than those teachers in the seminary were — all of them had designs on you. True friendship exists only for itself. I know that I cannot shake your beliefs, but I want to be a friend whom you can trust, even though I work against you politically.'

The girl met his gaze frankly.

'I know that you are my friend, Stephen Brooke, and, though you are my enemy as well, there is no one I should rather have for friend. You may believe it.'

They sat for a moment until each seemed to realize the tenseness of attitude toward the other, and then they laughed.

'How silly we are,' smiled the girl. 'Of course

we can be friends, for there is nothing in the revolutionary doctrine to prevent it.'

'Oh, this Revolution!' Brooke's face became troubled again. 'I wish you weren't in it, Alexandra. Sometimes you exasperate me beyond words. You sit there with such a solemn face, as though you were a woman of forty, and I know that you can't be more than half of that. You're just a child and you don't realize one whit what you are doing. No, seriously,' he went on as the girl smiled, 'seriously and literally, you are starting something which will raise hell in China. You honestly haven't the least idea of what you are doing.'

The girl made a gesture of impatience, but Brooke stopped her.

'See here,' he said argumentatively, 'you want to bring communism to China. Do you think that the Chinese peasants and workmen have the least understanding of the doctrine you believe and want to teach? I like the Chinese and I honor them for all their high culture; but I tell you it would be arrant madness to pull down the dikes and let the water rush over the country in a wild flood.'

'There will be no flood,' replied the girl calmly. 'We shall guide and control all the powers we loose.'

'You think you will — you don't know the Chinese as I do; and, after what you have seen in your own country, you ought not to wish the same for any other land. Within all of us there is the animal — the primitive brute. You have seen

it unchained in Russia. Do you want even worse horrors in China? I tell you the Chinese aren't prepared for communism.'

Brooke's argumentative tone had aroused a similar controversial fervor in the girl. There was a passionate earnestness in her voice as she replied:

'Do not believe that there is any nation in the world which is not prepared for communism. Oh, not the scientific doctrine, perhaps — that doesn't matter in the least. I agree that the Chinese peasants and workmen wouldn't understand it. But the important thing is the establishment of the communist order. It corresponds to the original state of every human community and therefore corresponds to the human being.'

A sudden gust of wind, blowing through the dining-saloon, slammed shut an unfastened porthole. So engrossed had the two been in their conversation that they had failed to notice the change which had taken place in the atmosphere. The enervating sultriness of the last few hours had suddenly given way to an abrupt rush of cool air. The ship began to roll violently, as though caught in the trough of a heavy swell.

'Stephen,' said the girl in alarm, 'what is it?'

Cries from the deck answered her question.

'A typhoon, a typhoon!' shouted the sailors, as they rushed past the door, making everything fast.

'Good God!' cried Brooke, as he closed with difficulty the porthole to windward and screwed it home. Through it he gazed at the sea, already

rising in great masses topped with white foam and slamming against the sides of the Fenghui, ploughing her way uncertainly along. She seemed suddenly to have become a shuttlecock of the elements, tossed back and forth from crest to crest and then dropped, as though in a fit of their ennui, into the trough below.

'Isn't it glorious!' said a voice at Brooke's elbow, and he turned to see Alexandra, with an almost awed expression on her face, gazing out at the battle of the waters.

'Glorious, but terrible,' he said. He had been afraid for her a moment before, but the girl's calmness reassured him. 'We'll be lucky if this rotten old tub lives through it.'

'You feel that there is really some chance she may not?'

'I shouldn't have said that,' returned Brooke, cursing himself again for his habit of frank speech. 'Of course, there is every chance in the world that she will weather it, only . . .'

'Only . . .' she encouraged as he stopped for a moment.

'Well, the Fenghui isn't built for typhoons, that's all,' said Brooke, 'but there's no need for worrying yet, I reckon.'

They watched the progress of the storm for a while in silence. The engines were panting heavily, and every human effort seemed in vain in the titanic battle of the powers of nature which raged around them. Sometimes the screw raced feverishly in the air, then threatened to collapse under the sudden impact of the massive phalanxes of

water returning to the charge. Greedy waves passed heedlessly over the ship, and there was danger that the falling mountains would crush the deck like an eggshell. Yet, in spite of it all, the Fenghui careened on, buffeting the powers which seemed bent on her destruction.

'Look, there's the Captain,' exclaimed Alexandra.

Brooke followed the direction of her gaze and saw through the forward port the Master on the bridge, his knotty figure clad in oilskins. He was just dispatching a man down the gangway, and the two in the dining-saloon watched breathlessly as he made his way along, fearing each moment that he might be washed overboard. Once a gigantic wave scoured the deck, and Alexandra closed her eyes; but, when she opened them, he was still there, clinging to a stanchion and pausing for breath before making his final dash for the writing-room door next to the saloon from which they were watching. A moment later, fragments of conversation came to them through the flimsy partition. They recognized the voice of Dr. Ma as that of the man whom the first officer was addressing. His voice broke out angrily after the mate had explained his mission:

'Make for Hongkong? Quite out of the question!' Then, after an interjection by the other, he went on positively:

'It *must* be dared. Tell the Captain that this is not an ordinary passage. We are at war, and the Revolutionary Government expects the Captain to be willing to risk himself and his ship for the cause.'

The conversation seemed closed, and the watching pair saw the officer make his dangerous way back to the Captain, who was waiting on the bridge. The Master shook his head ominously as he received the answer, and turned to continue the unequal struggle with the elements.

'Ma's a fool,' burst out Brooke savagely. 'We haven't even gone through one side of the typhoon yet. We'll never weather it. Listen!'

He held up his hand for silence, for there was a sound of splintering wood as a lifeboat or some piece of heavy woodwork collapsed and went overboard with a crash.

'We've got to run into Hongkong. Ma must give way. He doesn't know these storms at all.'

'No, no,' pleaded the girl at his side, 'don't go on deck, Stephen. You could easily be swept away.'

As she held his arm, a strident voice resounded from the gangway leading down out of the saloon into the cabin passageway below.

'Gung-gung, the evil spirit of the water, is angry. The mount of imperfection is falling. Heaven and earth subside. The tortoise upon which the world rests is shaken. Where is Nü-wa, the holy woman who keeps the world in order? Why does she not send the spirit of fire to punish Gung-gung?'

As the harangue ceased, Brooke pressed the girl's arm.

'You see?' he said. 'They will force Ma to change his orders or will threaten his life.'

Other voices cried out:

'Be quiet, you fool! We must pray to the Holy

Mother. She rules over the seas and she alone can show us the way to safety.'

There was a rush of many feet in the passageways below, and Alexandra dropped back into a corner as the crowd of sailors and third-class passengers surged up into the saloon. In front of the holy picture they kowtowed the royal three times three, after which a sailor burned a talisman. Then the crowd anxiously gazed through the saloon portholes upon the storm and sea to watch for the effect. The Holy Mother did not appear to have responded, for the wind raked up the waves with undiminished strength and flung the ship mercilessly to and fro, like the helpless shell she was. After a few moments the worshipers continued their supplications and burned another talisman, bearing the image of the goddess.

Then came another pause, during which the storm continued with such merciless fury that the fear which had gripped the crowd changed to a wild terror. A third talisman was brought out.

'This will decide it,' whispered Brooke to Alexandra, who watched with fascinated eyes. 'If no answer comes, it means in their eyes that the ship is doomed.'

The frightened mob crowded the portholes, staring out with faces distorted by panic. Dark clouds were driving across the sky at a hurrying, frantic pace.

'The spitting dragons!' called out some one, and, as the man and girl looked from their corner, they could see two ragged clouds racing along not far above the water and looking not unlike two

great dragons, blowing spray from their mouths into the waves below.

'We must turn, the dragons will sink the ship!' shouted one of the sailors, who seemed to be something of a leader; but, just as the cry was taken up, another voice broke out above the tumult:

'There is the Empress of Heaven! She is hovering right over us!'

Brooke followed the gaze of the others through the porthole. One of the cloud-dragons had changed its form and reshaped itself into the figure of a woman with a sword lifted straight into the air. The apparition seemed to be moving with majestic slowness, uninfluenced by the storm-haste which had frenzied everything else. Suddenly the ship plunged into a deep valley of the waters and, when she came up again, the figure had disappeared. But where it had been on the starboard quarter, there was a light spot in the crowded, hurrying clouds, a spot which gradually became bigger.

'We must turn, put back to starboard!' was the unanimous cry in the saloon; and the next moment they had sent three of their number out on deck to carry their orders to the bridge. Brooke and Alexandra watched and shortly saw the Captain shouting something down the speaking-tube to the engine-room.

'Look!' cried the girl, 'we are changing our course. Stephen, stop him, stop him! We must not put in at Hongkong.'

'You, too?' exclaimed the man in surprise. Do you want us all to be drowned?'

She started toward the door, but the man held her back.

'Leave him alone,' he ordered gruffly, and then in a kinder voice he added: 'You can do nothing. Even if the Captain chose to hold to his course, the passengers would overrule him and make it impossible for him to carry on. Sit down, Alexandra. We are at least safe for the moment.'

With a gesture of despair, the girl sank into one of the chairs. Brooke saw through the port that the vessel was steering straight for the bright spot which was in the direction of Hongkong, that lay just to the south of the channel they had been following. The Holy Mother was not deceiving her believers.

After a short time, the terrible fury of the storm abated. The waves became quieter, and it seemed as though the ship were out of immediate danger. The first officer took over the command, while the Captain came down from the bridge and disappeared into the writing-room. In a moment the voice of Dr. Ma snapped out something in a violent rage, to which the Captain protested:

'What do you expect? What can we, a few officers, do against the crowd?'

'Then where are you steering for now?' fumed Ma.

'Straight for Hongkong. The Holy Mother is proving a good pilot. At the island there is an excellent typhoon shelter, where we shall be safe. This old boat might not stand another ten minutes of such weather, and I don't see how it would benefit the Revolutionary cause to have two of its most important emissaries lost.'

'But the storm seems to be over,' objected Ma.

'Not at all. You don't know typhoons. They come in a sort of cone, with a calm field in the center. We have gone through one wall and are now running in this quieter area for the moment. If the Holy Mother continues to be gracious to us, the storm center may travel with us to Hongkong; if not, we are in for it again. Should we dare to turn, hell would once more break loose around us.'

As there was a silence, Brooke turned to the girl.

'Ma has finally seen the light,' he said. 'And what difference does it make, anyhow?'

'Oh, you don't realize, Stephen,' wailed the girl.

'I realize that the Holy Mother has saved me from that pleasant little island prison which you had planned for me,' Brooke chuckled. 'You didn't know, Alexandra, that I traveled under the special protection of the Chinese gods, did you?'

'Please don't joke, Stephen. You are going into danger again. Oh, I hate it! I hate it!'

As she buried her face in her hands, Brooke allowed his arm to slip tenderly round her.

'I'm sorry, dear. Why don't you come along with me now at Hongkong? Leave all this nonsense behind.'

But the girl recovered her strength in a moment.

'No,' she flashed with sudden defiance. 'Sometimes I hate you! You make me forget the duty that is holy to me.'

Brooke was about to reply when the door opened and Dr. Ma entered the room. The expression on his face as he discovered the two together was one of unmistakable displeasure. Brooke waited for him to speak first.

'You will pardon me,' he said to Alexandra, ignoring Brooke, 'if I ask you to come on deck with me for a moment.'

'Of course,' said the girl hurriedly. 'Please pardon us, Mr. Brooke.'

The American bowed and stepped to the porthole. They were already just entering the spacious, protected harbor of Hongkong and apparently they had reached safety not a moment too soon; for the steamer had little more than slid into the anchorage before the oncoming wall of the typhoon crashed over the island with renewed fury, changing the water between it and the continent into a living hell for ships. Brooke shuddered as he thought what their fate might have been if they had not followed the guidance of the Holy Mother.

Alexandra and Dr. Ma stood on the deck, conversing in low tones. The purport of their conversation was, of course, unintelligible to Brooke, though he could plainly see that the Chinese was attempting to convince the girl of something to which she was objecting. Then the man disappeared in the direction of the passenger cabins, while Alexandra followed more slowly.

Brooke had no more than gone on deck and watched the anchor dive on its most welcome errand, before a Government launch came along-

side and a white-clad English boarding-officer climbed up the gangway.

'No one is to leave the ship until I give the word,' he ordered, as the Captain came down to greet him. He turned out to be an officer of the Police Department of Hongkong. 'We have received word that the Russian, Burjeff, who is called the "Courier of the Revolution," is on board this steamer and is carrying important documents back from India, where he has been negotiating with the native revolutionaries. What do you know about it?'

'Why should you look on the Fenghui?' questioned the Captain. 'We are not in the habit of carrying revolutionaries.'

'We have strict orders to search all incoming ships for him and his assistants.'

When the Captain had turned away, Brooke stepped up to introduce himself as a member of the American Consular staff at Canton. The Englishman in turn gave his own name and chatted with Brooke while his subordinates conducted a search of the luggage in the passengers' cabins. Only the American's things were left untouched, as his Consular position raised him above the possibility of suspicion.

For a moment he was tempted to take advantage of the turn of affairs to denounce the Captain and Dr. Ma as revolutionaries, thereby nipping their plans in the bud; but almost immediately he saw how impossible the resulting situation would be, as it would mean that Alexandra would also become involved, and Brooke still had

hopes of deflecting her from her dangerous course. Then, too, Whitehead's orders were that he keep in the strictest confidence the information he had stumbled upon in the Jade Mount. He was relieved as he thought of his chief's words, which thus lifted from his shoulders the responsibility of making a decision in which he feared personal considerations might assume too dominating a part. Consequently he awaited the result of the search in silence. Half an hour was sufficient to convince the English official that there was nothing of a suspicious character on board, so that he had only to ask the Captain's pardon for having bothered him before hurrying down into his launch, leaving the strange drama on board to work out its next scene.

Brooke smiled as he watched the craft puff away through the heavy seas in the direction of the piers. He was now free to leave the Fenghui whenever he chose, yet, strangely enough, he showed no anxiety to speed his departure. His step had no spring in it as he made his way to his cabin to collect his luggage and search out Alexandra to say good-bye for what he feared might easily be the last time. Still, he reflected, the ship would not remain long in port once the wind had abated; and, if he failed to make haste, he might again find himself a prisoner, bound for his island jail.

As he entered his cabin to gather up his things, his eyes lighted upon a strange leather bag, tucked away in one corner of his bunk. When he raised it and turned it over, he found it was

marked on the side that had been down with the initials 'A. G.' in large block letters. While he stood looking at it in astonishment, there was a knock at the door and Dr. Ma entered.

'You have not betrayed us,' he said with real warmth in his tone. 'That was a noble act, Mr. Brooke. We are adversaries, but we still remain friends.'

As Brooke's only answer was a look of astonishment, he went on hurriedly:

'The bag belongs to Miss Goluboff. I . . . I did not know what to do with it. You see, it must on no account fall into the hands of the English. You can guess the reason.'

Brooke's feeling was one of mingled anger and disgust. He was about to reply in far from ladylike phrases when he saw Alexandra in the doorway. His glowering look was a sufficient interpretation of the discovery.

'Don't you think this is stretching our friendship a bit too far,' he blurted out angrily, 'especially after our talk of this afternoon?'

'It was the only way,' replied the girl simply. 'I did not want to do it. But if the police had secured the bag, it would have placed me in a position of great difficulty, for the case contains the documents of Burjeff.'

Brooke started.

'The chap the English were looking for — and in my cabin! A nice business if it had been found there.' The girl hung her head. 'Consider it a special piece of good luck,' the American continued, turning threateningly to the Chinese, 'that

my lips happened to be sealed by orders from my superiors. If they were not, Ma, you would have been on your way at this minute to an English prison in Hongkong!'

'If your cabin had been searched,' interposed Alexandra, 'we should have explained our act. You were in no danger, Stephen, and you have saved the cause of the Revolution.'

Brooke grunted and turned to address another comment to Ma, but the Chinese had taken advantage of the interval to slip away from this far-from-cordial interview.

'You are not going to be angry with me when we are about to part, perhaps forever?' questioned the girl anxiously, placing her hand on Brooke's arm.

He glanced down, and again a sudden wave of emotion swept over him and left him trembling before her.

'Why don't you quit this gang of cut-throats and shake the whole vicious game? Get your things, Alexandra, and come along on the next big mail steamer north. I'll do my best to see you properly located and cared for by decent people, until . . .'

The girl realized the import of the pause. His words held such an honest, genuine ring that she bent her head as she pressed his hand. When she looked up there were tears in her eyes.

'No, no! Do not say more. Go now and go quickly.' Horrified and alarmed by some sudden flash of thought, she freed her hand and stood pale and humiliated before him. 'Oh, you are so

good, Stephen, so good and kind to me that it stabs me!'

'Alexandra, dear, what is the matter with you?' Frightened by her pallor, he held out his hands toward her; but she only waved him back.

'Don't touch me,' she warned him. 'I . . . oh, I cannot keep it from you longer . . . I am Burjeff, the Courier of the Revolution!'

CHAPTER X

THE JEWEL OF JADE

THE remainder of Brooke's journey from Canton to Shanghai passed without further incident. The Empress of Russia was sailing almost immediately, and after telegraphing Whitehead of his safe arrival, he went aboard her with little thought of revolutionists or secret society agents. Yet there was one thought which dominated his mind and marred the placidity of the voyage — Alexandra. Lead himself off as he would to the other and lesser rooms in the gallery of his mind, he found himself constantly returning to that picture of her as she was when last he saw her, just before he had turned abruptly and strode angrily down the deck to take his place in the tender which was to carry him ashore. There had been a pale, drawn expression on her face as though she were conscious of pronouncing her own death sentence in confessing her identity as one with the notorious Burjeff. He remembered the tears in her eyes, and now each one seemed to burn like a drop of molten fire into his heart.

He cursed himself again and again for having allowed the sudden wave of anger to submerge his better judgment. He should have remained with her, he reasoned, should have taken her away with him, anything to lift her from the company of the beasts who were her co-conspirators.

The thought was still fagging his mind as he

landed on the Bund at Shanghai, to be met by the hearty handshake and warm congratulations of the American Consul, who had come down to the jetty partly to make sure the interpreter should arrive at the Consulate in safety and partly out of curiosity to have the details of the 'Brooke case' as quickly as possible. But the young emissary's instructions from Whitehead so definitely forbade the slightest indication of the real import of his mission that he was forced to leave Consul-General Howlett's curiosity unsatisfied. He remained just long enough in Shanghai to dispatch his cipher message to Washington and go on board the gunboat Lincoln, which Whitehead's urgent telegrams to Howlett had placed in readiness to rush him up the coast to the railway at Taku.

When Brooke arrived in Peking, he found, as Dr. Ma had already informed him on the Fenghui, that the die was cast — cast, indeed, toward an abyss whose depth was immeasurable. During the first ten days of his stay in the capital three English steamers from Canton disappeared. Sketchy reports reached the English authorities of attacks at the mouth of the Pearl River, after which each ship in turn was summarily sunk. The English officers and passengers were taken by the robbers to the island of Linting and released, but only after every one had been minutely examined and his identity established.

As the reports continued to drift in, the American thanked Providence for the good fortune which had dictated his sailing on the Fenghui,

since this careful examination of passengers meant, he felt sure, that the pirates were expending all their energies toward carrying out their sentence of death upon him.

Those were stirring days in Peking. Immediately upon his arrival Brooke delivered his report to the Minister, whom he found considerably aroused over the measures which the English were taking to curb the outrages. Fatuously the Governor of Hongkong and the flag officer stationed in the colony had given orders that a squadron of gunboats should run out to do patrol service and hold up for examination all Chinese boats on the Pearl River, totally disregarding the Chinese protests and their sovereign rights. The move was exactly the one which the crafty revolutionaries had anticipated; but, when Brooke pointed this out to the Legation officials, they only smiled.

A week later, however, they saw the wisdom of his interpretation. The whole of South China was aroused by what it felt to be an unwarranted trespass and an insult to the Chinese national rights. Political inciters did their part to fasten this idea in the minds of the people. The seventy-two guilds and nine charitable institutions of Canton held protest meetings to urge the people to proclaim a general strike and a boycott of English trade. Daily the native journals printed 'blood-letters,' epistles written with the blood of the protesting ones. Five Chinese students committed suicide at the door of the English Consulate in Canton in order to give expression to their pro-

test after the extreme Chinese custom. The whole of South China was straining at the leash, and one morning, when the citizens of Canton awoke, they found placards on the walls announcing that true democracy had now taken over the reins of government and would control the country under the name of TAIAN. The authorities had failed to curb the disorders, it said, and had allowed the English to carry out searches which no self-respecting government could endure.

The *coup d'état* of the revolutionaries was an unqualified success. They had laid their plans carefully, so that, with the foreign governments playing into their hands, not a voice was raised against them, not a drop of blood was shed. The word TAIAN, echoing everywhere throughout the land in a subdued undertone during the past few months as a shibboleth of terror and revenge, was alone sufficient to reduce the population to weak submission. Almost overnight the new authority spread itself throughout the whole of Kwangtung and Kwangsi and the greater parts of Kweichow and Yünnan. Now, with an insidious sureness, it was creeping northward into the valley of the Yangtze.

When Brooke went to warn the Prime Minister, Wang Tse-hsi, in Peking, the insurrection had already broken out in Canton. But the story of the interpreter in the American service was of great value to the central authorities, as it exposed real facts of the inner connections of the mysterious movement, related by a witness who was beyond suspicion. The Prime Minister was

keenly interested, but Brooke noticed that he also very much wanted to know some details concerning the enemies of the Revolution, especially the counter-organization, to which his friend Li Hang-po belonged. In response the American told him as much as he thought prudent, but he could not get rid of a strange feeling of anxiety in his presence.

Brooke was thinking of these things as he was taking a ride the afternoon before Whitehead's arrival. His strong Mongol pony had carried him at a good trot out to the Race Course. After having a go over the jumps, he turned back more leisurely toward the city gate. Not far from the exit, he saw the beggar who day after day used to pester the visitors to the Course for alms.

'Great Old Master, do good deeds, do good deeds.'

Most of the Europeans had the habit of avoiding this repulsive creature by riding along the other side of the road, while others, more charitably disposed, threw him occasionally a copper coin; but Brooke stopped and dropped his alms into the hands of the beggar, although a feeling of repulsion overcame him too. For the old man's appearance was awful. His covering consisted of a few rags of sackcloth hanging confusedly over the withered body, filthy with dirt. The long black hair which covered neck and cheeks was felted together and the face disfigured through repulsive illnesses or through fearful uncleanliness. Brooke knew that the Chinese beggars make a point of appearing as pitiful as possible.

This man was a master of the art. He gave the impression of a living corpse, already beginning to decay. His professional wail resounded hollow, as though coming from another world, as Brooke rode up.

While he was giving a coin to the man, he felt something quickly pressed into his hand. It was a folded, sealed Chinese letter. Brooke rode on to read the missive at a place sheltered from observation. The carefully pasted envelope bore a seal which he could not decipher. But the contents were clear. Somebody invited him to come the following evening at eight o'clock to the teahouse of An Ch'un Tien, the Inn of Peace and Spring, outside the Tartar city, to drink a few cups of wine. The correspondent was surely his friend Li Hang-po. There was no signature to the letter, but the writer described himself as 'the gambler of the Taiping Kai.' There could be no mistake.

Or was he to be enticed into a trap? Since his adventures in South China he had become a bit cautious. The secret societies had no great power in Peking; still they were surely represented there. After his departure from Canton, Brooke had taken the precaution to grow a little mustache and the start of a pointed beard, so as to make it more difficult to be discovered, if there should be any pursuers. Had any hostile agent been clever enough to recognize him in spite of this change? But surely the writer could not be an enemy. For no one knew anything about the episode in the gambling-den of Canton except Li Hang-po, who

had been concerned in it, and Whitehead. Probably Li Hang-po had just wanted to show by this reference to the incident in Canton that really he, and no enemy, was the writer of the letter. Brooke decided therefore to accept the invitation.

But why this new secrecy? Had his friend also to conceal himself here in Peking and from whom? And why the invitation to one of those houses where the Chinese gay youths were in the habit of spending their money in revels night after night?

In the midst of the excitement, Whitehead, convoyed by the smiling Lai-fu, arrived in Peking to relieve the Minister. Brooke was overjoyed at meeting his chief again after all he had gone through. As Whitehead sighted him among the members of the Legation Staff who had come to greet the new Chargé, he called out:

'Brooke, I'm glad to see you, boy. They haven't got you yet, eh?' and he emphasized his joy at the meeting by giving the younger man a resounding whack on the shoulder.

'Any trouble on the trip, sir?' Brooke inquired anxiously, after the preliminary greetings were over.

'Not a bit, not a bit,' Whitehead assured him. 'I guess they're still a bit afraid to tackle us, eh, Lai-fu?'

The Chinese grinned his appreciation of his master's regard as he busied himself over the host of traveling-cases which had been brought from Canton. Whitehead had left the night before the *coup* which had placed the TAIAN Government in control and was consequently unable

to give any information concerning it to Brooke, as they rode to the Legation.

'It looks bad, my boy.' He shook his head ominously. 'We've got our work cut out for us here, you and I. What does the Chinese Prime Minister say to it all?'

'That's what I want to talk to you about,' said Brooke, when they were alone in the quarters which his chief was to occupy. 'I went to see him when I first arrived, after having talked with the Minister. Wang Tse-hsi was very much interested, though of course affairs had gone so far that the Central Government already knew of the threatened insurrection. But there's something queer there, I think, sir,' Brooke went on gravely.

'Prime Minister playing both ends toward the middle?'

'Precisely. It looks to me as though he were keeping a watchful eye on both parties so that, if TAIAN proves really successful, he will have a hold there. He began pumping me about the counter-revolutionary society, the one to which Li Hang-po belongs. Actually, of course, I don't know anything definite about it myself, but I couldn't help feeling that he was a bit too interested.'

'But he might very naturally have wanted reliable information about it,' objected Whitehead.

'Quite possible; but it was something about the man himself that estranged me. I don't trust him.'

'Well, well,' mused the Consul, 'we shall see. Perhaps if you could get in touch with Li Hang-po, he could tell you something about Tse-hsi.'

'That's another thing,' Brooke went on. 'Yesterday I rode out to the Race Course to have a try at the jumps. When I was coming back I ran into the beggar whom I have noticed half a dozen times in the same spot. I gave him a coin and, as I did so, felt him press something into my hand. It turned out to be a Chinese letter inviting me to come at eight o'clock to-night to the tea-house of An Ch'un Tien outside the Tartar City. There was no name, but the writer signed himself as "the gambler of the Taiping Kai."'

'And that means Li Hang-po,' observed Whitehead.

'Does it?' questioned Brooke. 'Or is it a trap?'

'Confound the stupid dramatics of these chaps! Why doesn't he sign himself Li Hang-po and be done with it? I'll tell you, though, my boy,' he went on after a moment, 'perhaps he did that to make sure that you would know it *wasn't* a trap. Some of the revolutionaries might have recognized his name, but it's a pretty long chance against their knowing him as "the gambler of the Taiping Kai!"'

'I believe you're right, sir. I think I'd better go, don't you?'

'Yes, I do,' replied the Consul deliberately. 'Li Hang-po can give us valuable information that we need. It will be well to get in touch with him again.'

Brooke entered the An Ch'un Tien that evening with some little curiosity. Though he had previously been in Peking, he had never before chanced to visit this celebrated inn patronized by the

flashy element of the city, and he felt a considerable interest in seeing its interior, together with the gay world which nightly gathered there. There was no display, according to the European standards. The entrance, as in most Chinese eating-houses, was close to the kitchen and led past the service courtyards; but the entering guests were sheltered from a sight of the staff by a low partition. The guest-rooms opened off the innermost court and were both small and simply furnished. Stools made of black wood encircled big round tables, each of them large enough for a dozen people. The rooms were rather dimly lighted, and in the background there were opium divans, where the guests could give themselves up to the forbidden enjoyment without being disturbed. The walls were almost without adornment, save for a few written or painted scrolls. Only the woodwork of the doors showed a certain desire for artistic ornamentation.

As the American entered the portal of the inn and stood for a moment uncertainly surveying the place, a servant came up to him. 'I know,' was all he said, as he led the way to one of the small rooms. Brooke smiled to himself as he noted the mysterious manner of his guide and wished that Whitehead might have been along to contribute another of his curses upon the Oriental sense of the dramatic. At one of the doors the servant halted and, after knocking, motioned Brooke to enter. There was but a single individual in the room, who smiled a most cordial welcome as the American stepped in.

'I have known for some days that you had received a transfer to Peking,' he explained, after the first words of greeting were over. 'The beggar at the Race Course is a watchman in our service.'

'I thought as much,' smiled Brooke, taking the seat which his host offered him. 'What is he, Li Hsien-shêng, a mandarin or something in disguise?'

'Hardly,' smiled the Chinese, 'but in these times it is a good thing to be pleasant to all people, as far as one may.'

Under pressure of his host's questions, Brooke related his experiences since the two had parted in Kueilin and, as he told of the narrowness of his escape from the Fenghui, watched Li Hang-po shake his head sadly.

'Our spies see much, and they have orders to protect you as far as lies within their power. But our emissary sent to deliver the warning to you in Canton missed you by half an hour.'

'You are very kind to be so continually on the lookout for me,' said Brooke.

'It is for China—for China and because I am eternally grateful to you for saving my life.'

There was silence for a moment, and then he went on:

'You have seen Premier Wang Tse-hsi and told him of TAIAN?'

'Why, yes,' agreed Brooke in surprise. 'The Legation considered it advisable for me to do so.'

'I should have warned you,' the Chinese explained. 'You must not think that every Minister, just because he holds such a post, or even

that the Prime Minister himself, is a man above suspicion to whom one may talk without restraint.'

'Then I was right,' mused the American.

'You were right?'

'Yes,' continued Brooke. 'Wang Tse-hsi asked me about the counter-revolutionary movement with which you are associated, and for some reason I suspected him of duplicity.'

'Heaven defend your wisdom,' murmured the Chinese fervently. 'Your intuition but bears out what I have surmised, but have been unable to prove. Wang Tse-hsi is a lazy fellow, and may not be greatly implicated, though I feel sure he knows of the latest crime which the revolutionaries plan.'

'And that is ——' Brooke paused significantly.

Li Hang-po drew closer to his companion and his voice fell almost to a whisper. 'Mr. Brooke,' he said tensely, his face revealing the emotions which played beneath his usually phlegmatic exterior, 'TAIAN has come to Peking. Within a few days, unless we can stop it, the President will be deposed, possibly murdered, and the hand of TAIAN will be upon the throat of the North as it is now upon that of the South.'

'The devil,' muttered Brooke. 'As near as that!'

The Chinese held up a finger for silence. 'So far,' he said, 'I know nothing of the plan. Only that it is contemplated. But to-night . . .' Again he gave the sign for silence and looked significantly toward the partition of the next room from behind which came the loud voices of two guests, playing the drinking game of *hua ch'üan.*

'Who are they?' questioned Brooke, failing to understand from the disjointed remarks the character of the conversation.

'Tien Nei-hung, private secretary to the President, and another Government official,' whispered Li Hang-po. 'They come here frequently to spend their time with the singing-girls. Tien Nei-hung is known to have a powerful influence over the President and is called by many the real ruler of China. He comes from Canton, and we know that he is in league with the TAIAN movement.'

Brooke nodded slowly as the significance of his companion's plan began to seep into his mind. There was a commotion in the next room and the sound of a woman's voice.

'That is the Jewel of Jade, one of the singing-girls,' whispered Li Hang-po. 'She is Tien Nei-hung's favorite at the moment. A shrewd piece, too,' he added with satisfaction. 'I have given her money, and coached her in the part she is to play to-night. She will draw out Tien Nei-hung on the plans of the conspirators.'

Brooke smothered an uncontrolled laugh. 'I say, Hsien-shêng. That's a mighty clever trick. Coaching the chap's own mistress to betray him!'

'Sh-h,' warned Li Hang-po. 'It is impossible for us to hear more than scraps of their conversation, but as soon as Tien Nei-hung falls asleep under the influence of his opium pipe, the Jewel of Jade will report to me. Then we shall know.'

The voices in the next room dwindled to two as the secretary's companion was led to another room by a second singing-girl, and the listeners

strained their ears to catch the conversation which followed. But Tien Nei-hung was cautious. The clearer tones of the girl were sometimes audible through the thin partition, but her companion's voice continued almost in a whisper. Scraps of their conversation floated through. 'Banquet . . . proclaimed Emperor . . . deposed . . .' But it was no use, and the anxious pair gave it up.

'No matter,' shrugged Li Hang-po. 'Though it would have been better to hear it from the scoundrel himself. But the Jewel of Jade will not lie.'

They settled down to wait for the powerful drug to overcome the secretary, each lost in his own thought. The monotonous tones in the next room came as a lullaby, and Brooke, despite the tenseness of the situation, felt drowsiness overcoming him. He must have slept, for he was not conscious of the singing-girl's entrance. He came to with a start to see her carefully closing the door behind her.

'Come,' said Li Hang-po. 'We can gain nothing by remaining here longer.'

Brooke was wide awake again as he followed his companion into the dimly lighted street. 'Well?' he demanded eagerly.

'It is worse than we thought,' said Li Hang-po gravely. 'TAIAN does not waste its time.'

'But the plan,' pursued Brooke. 'When is it to be carried out?'

'According to the Jewel of Jade, day after tomorrow at the banquet to be given in celebration of the President's birthday.'

'By Jove,' exulted the American. 'If they try

anything on that occasion, we ought to be able to stop them. Both Whitehead and I will be there.'

'Good,' replied the Chinese. 'Yet you need not worry, Mr. Brooke. A well-paid regiment at the Winter Palace will frustrate the plans of the conspirators for their *coup d'état*. But it is a terrible business, terrible.' For almost the first time since Brooke had known him, the Chinese betrayed emotion.

'But what is their actual plan?' Brooke asked.

'It is surprisingly simple,' replied the Chinese. 'The President is a very vain man, and the conspirators have played upon him with flattery until he believes himself chosen of Heaven to found a new dynasty. At the banquet, his elevation to the Imperial rank will be proclaimed.'

'But the Powers,' objected Brooke. 'Will they consent?'

'Why not?' returned Li Hang-po with a shrug. 'The British, out of fear for India, where the revolutionary danger grows daily, are sure to think that the reëstablishment of the Chinese Empire would fortify their own rule in Asia; your Government will have no objection; and the Japanese imagine that they will acquire increasing influence in China with an Emperor whom they have helped to the Dragon Throne. Oh, no, Mr. Brooke, there would be no objection to an Emperor. It is the next step to which there will be objection.'

'Yes?' encouraged the American.

'The Powers think themselves clever,' con-

tinued the Chinese musingly, 'but they still have much to learn from the Orient. The conspirators have sounded out Japan and England, the only two Governments from which objection might be expected, and have found no obstacle in their way. In fact, Tanagawa, the Japanese Minister, has become — unwittingly, of course — an ally of TAIAN, for it is he who has been selected to drive the entering wedge. At the banquet he will rise in his preferred position as Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, to praise the governing ability of the President and compare it with the exemplary work of former Emperors. The Japanese will, of course, go no further, but his speech will furnish the opportunity for the Chinese general highest in rank to proclaim as Emperor the man who has been praised.'

'But,' objected Brooke, not following what was beyond, 'I don't really see what advantage there would be to the revolutionaries to have an Emperor reigning in China rather than a President.'

'Softly, my friend,' said Li Hang-po. 'Was it not said that Cæsar was an ambitious man and that he should be deposed for that reason? So, it will be argued concerning the new Emperor Pao Tsu. He, too, is ambitious, the conspirators will argue, and on the very day that he is exalted to his high estate, in another part of the palace they will be proclaiming his downfall and the existence of TAIAN as the ruling government of North China. Do you follow me?'

'Rather,' burst from Brooke's lips excitedly. 'And that skunk, Tien Nei-hung, is flattering the

President into taking this step, though all the time he is in league with the revolutionists?'

'Exactly,' replied the Chinese. 'He is more of a traitor than you suppose, for the conspirators plan to clear the way by murdering the audaciously proclaimed Emperor. But they will not succeed. The monarchy must not be established in China in such a way, and TAIAN must not be allowed to triumph. Our soldiers will see that neither happens.'

'But your soldiers cannot prevent the monarchists' *coup d'état* at the banquet,' objected Brooke, 'and you have just said that the monarchy should not be reëstablished in that way.'

'Those offenders against true monarchistic ideas will meet their deserved fate,' replied Li Hang-po evasively.

'But the President,' persisted Brooke; 'you're not going to let him be done away with in such a cowardly manner?'

The Chinese was silent, apparently deep in thought, as they hurried along.

'What's the matter with you, Li Hsien-shêng?' questioned the American, puzzled by his friend's silence. 'I'll do what I can to help. Only promise me to find out from the Jewel of Jade what Tien Nei-Hung answered, when she asked him whether the President was to be killed at the banquet or afterwards.'

'Whether the little devil will now tell anything which might harm the plans of her lover,' growled Li Hang-po, 'is a question. She has the prospect of becoming the favorite wife of a President, and I

have told you that she is shrewd. But I shall ask her. Our roads part here. It is not good for us to be seen too much together.'

Brooke left his friend with the uncomfortable feeling that he did not quite understand him. Were there also in the heart of this Chinese, who seemed honestly fond of him, dark corners which he could not penetrate? Would Li Hang-po, because of his fanaticism, really allow a murder to happen if such a dreadful crime were useful to his cause? And what was the cause, then, that Li Hang-po really served? Had he not just now said with bitter emphasis, 'The monarchy may not be set up in China in this way?' Not in this way! Did Li Hang-po and his counter-revolutionary organization of the Fang Huo Tuan wish to attain it in a different way?

But there was a second care that worried Brooke. During the monarchist *coup d'état*, which was to be frustrated, the TAIAN conspirators would overthrow the Government somewhere in the palace. Representatives of the Russian Communistic Committee were expected, which meant that Alexandra would be there with them! Indeed, had she not confided to him on the Fenghui that, owing to 'an important occasion,' she would soon arrive in Peking? What a frightful thought to know her to be concerned in something so ghastly and so dangerous! It was indeed a real peril which she was likely to face, because her purpose, too, was to be frustrated; had not Li Hang-po sworn it? And he was not able to warn her whom, in his mind, he now frankly con-

sidered his beloved one, not knowing her present whereabouts. But he would certainly find some way to protect her — in his innermost soul he was sure of that.

He reached the Legation and burst in upon Whitehead, who was nervously waiting for him.

'Thank God, you're back. I was beginning to be worried.'

'No need for it in my case,' said Brooke breathlessly, 'but, by Heaven, sir, we've got to work fast. TAIAN is in Peking!'

'Here, sit down and have a drink and tell me what you've heard.'

The interpreter related his story as briefly as possible, ending with a plea to his chief to stop at nothing to enable him to warn Alexandra Goluboff of her danger.

'Here's a pretty state of things,' growled Whitehead as the report was finished. 'And you want me to save one of the chiefs of the conspiracy. Brooke, my boy, you're meddling with dangerous business.'

'But she doesn't realize what she is doing,' persuaded Brooke. 'She's a mere slip of a girl, sir.'

'She's a woman, isn't she?' remarked Whitehead, whose hatred of the sex was traditional in the Service. 'But don't worry about her, boy. We'll do what we can. As to the rest, we've got to be devilish careful. We can't violate neutrality, you know.'

'But we can save the President,' pleaded Brooke. 'I don't understand Li Hang-po any

more. He'll stop the TAIAN movement, but the rest we must do ourselves.'

They discussed the situation far into the small hours of the night, coming to the one definite decision that they must await the word from Li Hang-po on the report of the Jewel of Jade. In the meantime, Whitehead would issue the necessary orders the first thing in the morning to attempt to discover the whereabouts of Alexandra Goluboff.

At breakfast Lai-fu handed Brooke a Chinese envelope which a messenger had brought and in which was an unsigned slip of paper, reading:

According to the Little Sister, after the banquet.

As Brooke translated it to Whitehead, his chief emitted a sigh of relief.

'That makes it easy,' he said. 'I'll warn the President during the banquet and offer him my carriage for an immediate call at the Legation after the affair. There will not be the slightest danger, as they will not dare attack him while he's under my protection. Don't worry, my son, we'll save him and this devil of a woman you've grown so fond of, as well.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Brooke gratefully.

CHAPTER XI

EMPEROR PAO TSU

THAT day and the next passed without any information having been received of Alexandra, and Brooke felt a dull misgiving in his heart. Peking had been searched thoroughly, without a single clue as to her whereabouts; yet he was positive that she was in the capital and would be in the palace at the time of the banquet. It was with uncontrolled feelings of misgiving that he entered the Legation carriage at five o'clock on the afternoon of the state dinner to drive to the southern gate of the Old Imperial Winter Palace, which was the residence of the President.

As they approached the entrance and passed inside, a guard in European uniforms presented arms. At the portal of the palace, a high official, whose breast was crossed with the broad, red ribbon of an order, stepped up to them.

'I am Tien Nei-hung, the private secretary of the President,' he said in queerly pronounced, stilted English. 'I am pleased to make the acquaintance of the American Chargé d'Affaires. Allow me to take you at once to the "Blue Heaven Palace" to present you to the President.'

A feeling of disgust seized Brooke as he saw before him in the official the opium-smoker of the An Ch'un Tien. The face of the private secretary revealed nothing that might mark him as the

arch-traitor which the American knew him to be. In fact, at first glance his features seemed to reflect an upright, open character. His eyes might have been called good-natured had they not given hint of a shifty tendency through their nervous mobility.

The two Americans followed the secretary through a maze of passages to the 'Blue Heaven Palace,' where the presentation to the President took place with little ceremony. Brooke was frankly disappointed, though from Li Hang-po's description he could have expected little more. The head of the State, dressed in a field-marshal's uniform with many thick gold cords and epaulettes, but entirely devoid of impressiveness for all his costuming, stood in front of a raised armchair, leaning upon his sword. The only thing which distinguished him from the officers and state officials who were his attendants was his unusual height and strong physique.

A glimmer of interest crossed his rather ordinary features as Tien Nei-hung introduced the Americans, and he inquired in a voice which attempted to be genial if Whitehead had had a pleasant journey. He also addressed a few words to Brooke, when his chief mentioned his name. With that the brief ceremony was over.

Left to themselves, the two slipped into the background of diplomatic officers. Whitehead knew the British Minister from earlier days and fell to chatting with him. As the other foreigners came in, they joined their diplomatic associates until two groups, one of Chinese and the other of

foreigners, were formed. Only a few who had a fluent command of both English and Chinese made the exception. Brooke, as one of these, had been talking with a Chinese official until, as the latter was beckoned away by some friends, Tien Nei-hung, the very man he wished to avoid, stepped up, making superlative compliments on his fluent Chinese. The American listened to his fulsome praise with ill-disguised loathing and was immensely relieved when the signal was given for the guests to assemble at the banquet. Nor could he rid himself of the persistent thought of the peril into which Alexandra might have been drawn by the machinations of this same treacherous individual.

The table was arranged in the shape of a horseshoe with the Japanese Minister, as Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, opposite the President. The British Minister and the American Chargé d'Affaires were placed on either side of the head of the State. The other guests were seated in such a way that there was always a foreigner between two Chinese, a circumstance that put a damper on conversation, as many of the guests did not speak Chinese with sufficient fluency. The feeling of stiffness that marked the beginning of the feast was soon relieved by the abundance of the wine, served without any intelligent order, clarets and sauternes, heavy burgundies and champagnes being poured at the same time. The only instructions of the servants seemed to have been that the glasses be always full.

Brooke's feeling of apprehension, engendered

by the constant thought of Alexandra's danger and his inability to aid her, was hardly calculated to be lessened by the extreme hilarity which the wine induced around him. A few Chinese especially showed a distinctly unceremonious gayety. He usually liked to play the game, but to-day he had no heart for drinking. His innermost soul was filled with anxiety. If the Jewel of Jade had told the truth, that the murder would not take place immediately after the proclamation of the President as Emperor, it would not happen at the banquet, he said to himself. But how would Whitehead be able to warn the President, as the latter could not speak any European language and the former could not speak Chinese? Brooke made up his mind to seize the first opportunity to reach his chief.

However, this did not come quickly. Between game and dessert some one rapped on a glass for attention.

'Now the play will begin,' thought Brooke grimly, and welcomed the diversion from his anxiety.

The Japanese Minister rose and made the speech predicted by Tien Nei-hung. He thanked the President in the name of the diplomatic body for the generous entertainment offered them. It was to his credit that all was quiet and that order reigned in the North of China, while in the South everything was confusion. Brooke smiled as he thought of the storm which was even then gathering over the palace. Surely, the Japanese Minister went on, after the thunder of applause which

greeted his last remark had subsided, under such wise guidance China would look forward to glorious times, just as under the legendary Emperors Yao and Shun.

'Ten thousand years to the great ruler of China!' was the toast that ended the speech.

Brooke looked around curiously to see how the Chinese guests had taken the significant words of the Japanese diplomat. Most of them were noisy and broke out in wild applause, but on the faces of a few of the initiated anxious expressions could be seen. Evidently they were nervously wondering if the end of the *coup d'état* would be all that was expected.

Among those who definitely revealed their anxiety was Tien Nei-hung. Brooke thought to himself:

'The scoundrel is already preparing for his new part.'

The clap-trap went on as intended. Hardly had the Japanese stopped and taken his seat again when a very tall officer sprang up; it was the Governor-General of Manchuria.

'His Excellency, the Japanese Minister, has phrased what we all feel in our hearts,' he cried with a powerful voice. 'Our President is a great ruler. He is favored of Heaven. This is shown by the triumph of his Government. And where Heaven speaks so plainly, should we mortals keep silent? The last Emperor fell because the *Ming*, the divine mission, was taken from him. The *Ming* has been conferred upon our President. Heaven has thus marked him as our Emperor.' There was a pause, during which he looked about

at the faces around him before he boomed out: 'He *is* our Emperor. Rise, gentlemen, rise, and pay homage to our Emperor, Pao Tsu. May the Emperor Pao Tsu live ten thousand years! May his dynasty rule ten thousand times ten thousand years!'

Brooke was brought to his feet in the clamor and shouting which followed the speech and, sick at heart with the thought of the duplicity which had engendered it, watched while the monarchists rejoiced and shouted, apparently trying with their evidences of enthusiasm to carry the others along with them. The President, or rather, the new Emperor, said a few words which were quite lost in the general hubbub. It was with difficulty that the chamberlains at last marshaled the guests to their seats again.

With the dessert, only champagne was served. The corks popped incessantly, and the expensive wine literally flowed in streams. When the meal was finally over and cigars, coffee, and liqueurs were passed, the announcement was made that it was the Emperor's wish that his guests remain a little longer to witness a special entertainment which he had provided. There was a general movement toward the center of the hall, during the confusion of which Brooke found his long-awaited opportunity for speaking to Whitehead. But his chief was still complacent.

'Don't worry, my boy,' he reassured him. 'As long as the President is at the banquet there is no danger, and I'll get him away immediately afterwards.'

'I don't like it,' returned Brooke, shaking his head, as the first of the Emperor's entertainers made their appearance.

'The Emperor likes the old Chinese music,' one of the chamberlains announced. 'He wants to make the *Kun Chiang* style of music popular again, and special musicians will play *Kun Chiang* selections for you.'

The orchestra which appeared was very little different from that of the ordinary Chinese theater. There were several forms of flat drums and gongs, a kettledrum, cymbals, and some stringed instruments of the simplest primitive type. A flute with eight holes held the dominant place. The Chinese listened intently and at some of the climaxes which particularly pleased them called out their commendatory '*Hao-ao*.'

'Now we shall have the jugglers from the South, the most celebrated group in China,' announced a chamberlain.

Brooke moved nervously as he heard 'from the South,' that seat of the TAIAN insurrection, reminders of which seemed to press in upon him from every side. He leaned forward as the troupe appeared. It was composed of a dignified old man with the long, pointed beard of a viceroy of the old imperial times; a rather fat, elderly man who was to act as clown and was called 'uncle' by the others; two muscular, handsome youths and a charming boy of about five years.

The entertainment consisted of the usual Chinese juggler tricks. Dishes of water, bowls with living goldfish, big lighted lamps and plates

of food were, in some mysterious way, produced as by witchcraft from out of the garments of the performers or from under the tightly stretched carpet on the floor, only to disappear in the same mysterious manner. Even the boy, who had been sent out to bring in something, was suddenly produced from under the long coat of the old man. Everything was done with such charming ease that Brooke marveled and admired, despite his anxiety. The '*lang-dang lang-dang i go lang-dang*,' the magic words which accompanied each trick, were always intriguing, while the pauses between turns were pleasantly filled by the clown, who pretended to imitate the others, but, even though he always failed, was yet clever in his acrobatic way.

When the performance had lasted well on toward half an hour, the old patriarch stepped closer to the guests and announced that he wished to show the honored assembly a special trick which ordinary humans were not allowed to see. He begged all to watch to the end and not to interrupt.

There was a dead silence while the old man tossed a thin rope up into the air. The assembly gasped, as it stood rigid in his hand. To show that it was not fastened to the ceiling, he moved the standing rope to and fro. When all had been satisfied, he ordered the child to climb up the line. After he had gone up and slid down again, both youths followed his example. The thin, standing rope did not bend under the climbing burden, but seemed to have changed into a rigid pole.

'That is a wonderful thing!' exclaimed the

clown. 'In that way one could climb up to Heaven.'

'Well, now, Hsiao-chu, see if you can climb up to Heaven,' said the old man to the boy.

The child scrambled up again and, as he reached the top — disappeared. An interval of silence passed. Then all at once from above came the loud weeping and wailing of a child's voice, which as suddenly died down again. Great fear showed itself on the faces of the other jugglers.

'A-li, hasten up and see what has happened to Hsiao-chu,' the old man ordered, with a look as grave as death.

One of the youths climbed up, only to disappear as the child had. Again there was a silence, broken by the piercing shrieks of a young man, which ended in a sort of rattling noise.

'A-lo, go up and help your brother,' ordered the old man feverishly.

A-lo obeyed the order, carrying a dagger between his teeth. But the same thing occurred. A throat rattle was the end.

'Uncle, you must go now,' was the final sharp command of the old leader.

The uncle, who had until now played the part of clown, became most grave and started on his way, carrying a naked sword bound on by his cloth girdle. After he had disappeared, there came from above a clash of arms that ended with a fearful cry.

The old juggler wept like a babe, tore his hair and his clothes, wailing:

'An evil spirit has killed all my family! I must avenge them.'

He seized a spear from the ground and swung himself up the rope, which was now simply suspended in the air. Then from above surged down a great din of battle, in which two strong beings seemed to be fighting. Swords and spears clashed, feet stamped and yells resounded through a struggle of the greatest ferocity, unseen by those who listened breathlessly below. Then suddenly the place was flooded with an unnatural, fearful howling, such as only a monster, mortally hit, could have emitted. A great, red stream of blood gushed down from above to the floor of the hall and splashed some of the guests of the Emperor.

Horror seized the spectators. What they had seen and heard had been no entertainment, but a terror that shook their nerves. Amongst the Orientals there might be some uninitiated who believed in supernatural things; but the foreigners, too, who were realists, were no better off than the Chinese. They all sat on the edges of their chairs, pale and with throbbing pulses, unable to say a word. The unnatural sounds they had heard were still haunting their ears; a rattling noise pursued their senses.

But did this ghastly, throaty sound not come from the penumbra of the hall? In a moment Brooke realized, even before a voice called out that the Emperor had been stricken, the ruse which had been perpetrated upon them all.

There was great confusion, as every one crowded to see what had happened. Brooke, who was near by, at once noticed that the features of the victim were dreadfully distorted. The eyes

were starting out of their sockets, and foam covered the lips. A foreign doctor, who was among the guests, came forward. After a short examination in the breathless silence, he stood up and in a low voice said:

'Gentlemen, the President is dead! The cause of his death will yet have to be ascertained.'

A panic threatened. The Chinese raged, while the foreigners made hurried preparations to leave.

The Governor-General of Manchuria called into the room:

'The guard is coming, the guard is coming! The sorcerer from Kwangsi has murdered in the air the soul of the Emperor. Catch the fiend!'

It might readily be that one of the jugglers had killed the President while the spectators were entirely absorbed in their tricks of illusion. Brooke, who knew that it was intended to do away with the head of the State, felt certain that a few potent drops in one of the last glasses of champagne had more than likely done the deed. His chagrin that he had not been able to prevent the murder was great; but, in spite of his inner excitement, he at first kept so calm outwardly that he was himself astonished.

'The Chinese believe that the soul of man floats above his head,' he whispered to Whitehead. 'Thus this senseless supposition of the Governor that this illusory battle-scene in the air had to do directly with the murder. But the jugglers are not necessarily the criminals, even though the murder took place during the entertainment.'

Whitehead nodded silently.

'The Jewel of Jade lied,' he said gravely, 'or else your friend Li Hang-po purposely misled you.'

Fear smote Brooke's heart. He was stirred from his first horror over the murder by immediate thoughts of Alexandra. She must be somewhere about, thinking that all is well and ready to play her part in the *coup d'état*. As the guard poured in, searching for the jugglers, Brooke was galvanized into action. The guests were already leaving, but the American, instead of following them to the Southern Gate, turned and ran toward the inner part of the palace.

Wild thoughts shot through his head as he rushed along. Till now all had come about quite as Tien Nei-hung had predicted to the singing-girl. But the second part of the planned *coup* would eventuate differently. Li Hang-po would take care of that. Had not the influence of his Chinese friend already disturbed the programme of the revolutionaries? Had not Li Hang-po succeeded in having at the decisive moment a guard faithful to the Government on the spot, a guard which obeyed the order of the Governor-General of Manchuria? Now they would soon begin to seize the revolutionaries who, having no suspicion that their plot had failed, were somewhere within the palace proclaiming their realm of fantastic ideas, which they thought already assured. A shudder ran through Brooke as he hurried along. Alexandra was exposed to frightful possibilities. The enraged generals would accuse her and all the other conspirators of the murder, whilst in truth

— and Brooke was sure of that — no one was responsible for the vile act but the Trias and its tool, the double-faced Tien Nei-hung. She must be saved, but where was he to find her?

Guided by distant cheering, the American ran toward the north through several courts until he found himself in one where two red flags with the star of the Revolution upon them hung in front of the middle pavilion. Brooke rushed in. A crowd of young Chinese, dressed in European style — small men with spectacles, pince-nez, and fashionable frock coats — were assembled there, enthusiastically cheering one of their number on the platform, whom Brooke recognized as Dr. Ma. And there at his side sat Alexandra, calm and composed.

'Friends,' the speaker was just saying at this moment, 'TAIAN will be victorious. It has already conquered. The President of the old, vicious system has just been proclaimed Emperor. He relies upon those vampires, the Military Governors of the North. Now the whole of China will join us, for he who has the troops has the power. The Generals believe the troops will follow them, but we know better; for he who has funds at his disposal controls the army — and we have the money. If we can maintain our hold in the palace, the troops will all join us. Negotiations have already begun.'

As applause and shouting greeted the close of the speech, a door behind the platform was burst open, and Tien Nei-hung entered breathlessly.

'Our plan has failed,' he called between his

gasps for breath. 'The battalion which mounted guard this afternoon obeys the Generals. You can now hope for nothing here. Save yourselves while you may!'

His words congealed the rejoicing into consternation, followed by confusion. Brooke made use of the uproar to work his way to the girl, who had sensed the ominous purport of the secretary's announcement and was standing uncertainly by her chair. As he reached his hand up to her from behind the platform, he commanded:

'Come down, Alexandra! I'll get you out of this.'

'Stephen! What are you doing here?'

'I'm saving you,' returned Brooke grimly, taking her by the arm and threading his way with her through the crowd. 'If you're caught, I don't know what will happen.'

'But Tien Nei-hung ——' said the girl, bewildered.

'He told the truth,' said Brooke, as he led the way through the palace around the lake toward the Southern Gate. 'There's going to be the very devil to pay for what has happened this afternoon, Alexandra. The Emperor has been assassinated.'

The girl was silent, but the American could feel her breath come in little gasps as the significance of his words dawned on her.

'Then we have failed?' she asked quietly.

'Yes, thank God! I'll tell you the rest when we are safely outside.'

They were just then rounding South Lake and

approaching the gate, which had been closed by order of the Generals and which was obscured from their sight by the thick foliage of the trees.

'We'll be questioned here, but by Chinese, so that you will not have to say anything. My invitation should get us through. If it doesn't . . .'

He did not finish his sentence, but the firm set of his jaw was significant. The soldiers at the gate showed considerable hesitation about letting a European woman pass, but Brooke bulldozed his way through.

'Thank God,' said he, as they slackened their pace a good distance from the palace.

'A second time you have saved me,' said Alexandra quietly, looking gratefully into her companion's eyes. 'What can I say?'

'You can say that you will come with me to the Legation and back to people of your own kind and give up this gang of conspirators,' said Brooke passionately. 'My dearest child, don't you know this ceaseless worry over you is driving me crazy? You don't belong with these people. I love you, and you say that you love me. Won't you come?' he pleaded.

'You make it hard, Stephen,' replied the girl slowly. 'Harder still because you know that I love you.' Brooke made a step toward her. 'No, dear,' she said, so softly that he could scarcely hear her words, 'it is my duty. I must be faithful to my comrades.'

'Your comrades!' Brooke stormed. 'Do you know who they are? Dr. Ma and the other young ideologists are inexperienced children who do not

know their own country. It is the secret societies that are your comrades. Oh, my dearest, I know that you do not sanction such deeds as the murder to-day, but don't you see? You become a party to them.'

'It is because of that, because the others will be suspected, that I must remain with them,' said the girl firmly. 'I must continue expiating the sin and ignorance of my father.'

Finding his persuasion of so little avail, Brooke took both the girl's hands in his own and pleaded with her:

'At least, then, try to take care of yourself! You mean more than life to me. Some day all of this will be over and there will be no more "duty" to keep you from me.'

The girl pressed his hand.

'I hope so,' she whispered softly. 'Oh, I hope for it and pray for it, Stephen. But not now.'

Another pressure on his hand, and the slim figure of the girl slipped away into the dusk of the falling night. With her some part of Brooke's soul, something of his real self, stepped into the night of disappointment and left him sick with an aching longing. Beaten and depressed, he went on down the Chien Mên and returned to the Legation.

CHAPTER XII

THE YELLOW PANTHER

Two days dragged slowly by, with the ache in the heart of the young American unrelieved. The accounts which the papers carried of the unceasing search for the murderers of the President were little calculated to help his anxiety and when, on the second evening after the crime, there was a stormy scene with Whitehead in which his chief berated him for having warned the revolutionaries, the tension broke and he loosed all the pent-up emotion which had been smouldering within him.

'Do you think I care a damn about the others?' he replied angrily to Whitehead. 'I didn't warn them at all. It was Tien Nei-hung who did that. I only helped the girl out of the palace.'

'And what for?' pursued his chief in rising anger. 'You ought to know better than to start an intrigue with a woman mixed up in a political plot. You can never trust 'em, even if they are your friends.'

'What for?' demanded Brooke. 'Because I love her, since you ask. And as for her politics, I don't like them any more than you do, but it is quite unnecessary for you to make remarks about my friendships, even though you are my chief. We'll leave personalities out of this.'

'In great political movements there are no

friendships,' was Whitehead's rather pompous rejoinder.

'Words!' retorted Brooke. 'You know as well as I do that the girl was in no way connected with the murder; but, if she had been caught, she would have been accused of it. I got her out of the palace to save her life — just as you would have done, had you known her.'

'How do you know that she is innocent?' cried Whitehead. 'You only have her word for it.'

Brooke took a step toward his chief, his fists clenched. They stood for a moment facing each other; then, without another word, the younger man turned and strode out of the room, leaving Whitehead immediately sorry for the scene which had occurred and for the hasty words he had uttered. He had a genuine, almost paternal fondness for Brooke, and it cut him to the quick that he should have wounded his subaltern. They did not meet again that evening, Brooke preferring to dine in his own quarters.

The next morning Whitehead was in a gloomy mood. Lai-fu had a bad time with him, for nothing was right. The porridge was burned, the mutton chop underdone, and even the fruit was found fault with by the bad-tempered man.

'You are a set of rattles, you and A-kee. You were surely loitering about again last night. If you do not behave yourselves better in Peking, I shall send you both home.'

Lai-fu's face betrayed no emotion, but he was hurt to the quick. Of course he had been loitering about with A-kee the night before. They had

been in the theater at the Tung An market in the Tartar city, and afterwards they had drunk several cups of rice wine. But of all this the *Ta-jên* knew nothing. If he was scolding to-day and found everything bad, then it could only be because something or other had thrown him into a temper. Under these circumstances Lai-fu preferred to make himself scarce.

The storm broke in another quarter, when the Chargé d'Affaires picked up the 'Peking Daily News' from the corner of the breakfast table to find in heavy letters across the top of the page:

MURDERERS OF THE PRESIDENT CAUGHT!

Whitehead snatched up the sheet and devoured the special report of the newspaper's correspondent in Kaifengfu, which detailed the capture in Chengchow the previous day of Dr. Ma, Alexandra Goluboff, and Michael Goluboff, confessed revolutionaries.

'Damnation!' fumed the Chargé, as the significance of the matter dawned upon him. Then he read further:

> The arrested persons admit that they were in the palace and do not deny that they intended to help carry out a *coup d'état* there; but the Chinese and the young woman obstinately refute the charge that they had anything to do with the murder. If, however, there should still be any doubt as to the guilt of the prisoners, it would be dispelled by the behavior of the old Russian. He talks very little, but when he is questioned about

the crime, he laughs in a sneering, most impertinent way.

A mingled feeling of pleasure and annoyance pressed upon Whitehead, as he finished the dispatch. He was glad that the revolutionaries had been apprehended, but he rather wondered what the outcome of the affair would be. He turned the page and found on the inside a second telegram from this same correspondent. As he read on, the color mounted into his face and, with a shout, he summoned Lai-fu.

'Go find Mr. Brooke,' he commanded, forgetting to address his servant in the usual manner. 'Bring him here. Hurry, you fool.'

Lai-fu's slippers fairly flew as he ran from the room, and Whitehead turned to read the telegram again.

> There can be no more doubt with regard to the guilt of the three prisoners. In a few days they will suffer capital punishment. According to the old Chinese law, the criminals will have to expect the death sentence for patricide, since the head of the country is the father of the people, and this will mean dismemberment of the living body. But as two of the convicted foreigners are Russians, in whose case there is fortunately involved no question of extraterritoriality, our enlightened Governor will act according to the modern law and give to the Chinese as well the benefit of this. The three murderers will most probably suffer death by hanging.

Whitehead beat with his fist upon the table until the porcelain clattered.

'I'll show them!' he roared to the vacant room. 'The Chinese revolutionary and the mad Russian may stew as far as I am concerned — but to let a white woman be hung by the Chinese! Hell and the angels!' He paused as Brooke entered, followed at a respectful distance by the frightened Lai-fu. The chief sprang to his feet with such vigor that his chair fell back with a crash.

'Brooke,' he shouted, as he caught sight of his subaltern, 'have you seen the paper?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the man, whose perturbation showed itself in the set of his jaw and the glint in his eyes.

'Well, well,' fumed his chief, 'why don't you say something, then? Don't you know that they've been caught? Are you going to let them hang the girl?'

'Are you?' countered Brooke, still rankled by Whitehead's words of the day previous.

'Don't be a fool, boy. Leave off your dignity. It would serve her right for meddling with politics, but it isn't going to be allowed. And she's innocent, too.' He was silent for a moment, pacing up and down the room. Then he stopped. 'Brooke, you get away to Kaifengfu at once. There's a train in half an hour. Everything stops while you give your evidence as to the innocence of these people. I'll take the necessary steps here with the Central Government and have them inform the Governor of Honan to receive you and give consideration to what you say.'

Brooke hesitated, and Whitehead, divining the cause, held out his hand.

'Come, boy, no ceremonies. I'm sorry for what I said. We are friends again.'

The younger man took his hand gratefully.

'Thank you, sir,' he said simply, but there was a warmth in the clasp he gave his chief which left little room for doubt as to his relief.

'Now be off, and mind you take care of yourself,' were Whitehead's parting words, as he sat down again to finish his breakfast.

There was a great deal of commotion at the station of the Peking–Hankow railway as Brooke arrived just before the train pulled out. All the seats in the first class had been booked, and the second class was even more crowded. While he was reëxamining the first-class cars and seemed to be facing the unpleasant prospect of standing in the corridor, a friendly voice called out:

'How are you, Mr. Brooke? You are going South, too? I am glad of it, for we can travel together.'

The American turned, puzzled for a moment to place the other, who went on:

'You do not recognize me, perhaps? I am Tien Nei-hung, the private secretary of the late President.'

He had abandoned his European uniform and was dressed in the regulation white silk overgarment and black brocade sleeveless jacket of a Chinese gentleman, which accounted for Brooke's failure to identify him immediately. As the meeting was hardly a pleasant one, the American was about to decline the offer of companionship from a man who should have taken Alexandra's place in

the prisoner's dock, when he bethought himself that Tien Nei-hung might expose his plans in some way that would prove valuable.

Noticing his hesitation, the Chinese volunteered:

'There are no places left on the crowded train, but I have a private car in the rear. If you will accept my hospitality, you may have an entire compartment to yourself and be free from all interference.'

Brooke thanked him for the offer in the stereotyped manner of Chinese courtesy and made himself comfortable in the compartment which was placed at his disposal. For the first hours of the journey he was alone, while the train was running through the plain of Chihli. Cultivated fields, villages, and ancient walled towns flew past in an unbroken panorama of interest. During the long stop at Paotingfu, Tien Nei-hung entered his compartment.

'I trust you are quite comfortable,' he said with perfect affability, as he took a seat. 'It is a great pleasure to me that I can be of service to you. I am traveling as the representative of the Central Government to Kaifengfu. For that reason the railway company has put this carriage at my disposal.'

'It is very fortunate for me,' replied Brooke, 'for I was facing the prospect of standing.'

'Oh, that would have been too bad,' returned the other sympathetically. 'It is a long journey.'

There was a short silence, which Tien Nei-hung broke.

'You have surely read the "Peking Daily News" this morning?'

Brooke nodded.

'A gruesome story, is it not?' the official ran on garrulously; 'but it is a good thing that the guilty ones have been caught.'

'The scoundrel!' thought Brooke, as he felt an almost overpowering desire to close the throat of the amiable secretary forever; but instead he answered quietly:

'It has not yet been proved that those who were arrested are in reality the perpetrators of the murder.'

'On the contrary,' the Chinese emphatically responded, 'there are some irrefutable proofs, and nothing can save the three from conviction.'

Tien Nei-hung, in spite of his amiability, pronounced the last words very decisively, almost threateningly. As Brooke caught the implication in his tone, he wondered whether his own expression betrayed him and whether the private secretary had guessed the purpose of his journey. At any rate, he realized that he was being watched and answered with as much indifference as he could command:

'Really?'

'Yes, indeed,' went on Tien Nei-hung, the sharpness gone from his tone as quickly as it had come. 'And in the interest of the country it is a good thing that the names of the criminals are known. National safety demands it.'

'And your own,' added Brooke to himself.

'Some people say that the secret societies have

committed this murder,' Tien Nei-hung continued, following the ramifications of his thought. 'The talk about secret societies does no good; it simply causes a great deal of harm and must be suppressed. That is why it is a good thing that these three have been caught.'

The American maintained his silence. Tien Nei-hung, too, stopped talking for a while and looked out of the window; then, quite abruptly, he observed:

'I have been told, Mr. Brooke, that you are a great connoisseur of the secret societies, and that you know more than many of our own people about these organizations. There is a Chinese proverb which says that it does no good to wish to see that which is hidden. I admire your courage.'

Brooke's face was a mask. The perturbation which the words of the Chinese had caused did not reveal itself, as he turned to eye his companion.

The official continued with equanimity:

'On the day of the murder you were seen in the palace with the Russian lady. She is a friend of yours. I am sorry she will be sentenced. If you want to help her, take care not to act thoughtlessly. Now I shall leave you to yourself. We shall remain friends.'

He stood up and, with a smile that cut deeper than a Malay kris, held out his hand to Brooke. The latter was stupefied by the secretary's words. Queer, he hadn't thought before of the possibility of his having been seen with Alexandra! He rose mechanically to take the hand offered him.

'I am sorry that you must go,' he said awkwardly, and sat down again to think the matter out, after the Chinese had left the compartment. He wondered if Tien Nei-hung had meant to intimidate him or to give him a hint. It was evident from his remarks that he aimed to secure the conviction of the three prisoners and would use every means to thwart any attempt by Brooke to free Alexandra. The American made up his mind to act with all his energy, but, if possible, to save the girl without making an enemy of this dangerous man.

All passengers for Kaifengfu were forced to change at Chengchow. As there was unfortunately no train for the Honan capital that same evening, Brooke was obliged to spend the night in a small hotel of semi-European style, whose French proprietor had formerly been a minor official on the Peking–Hankow line.

During the long evening the talkative host, whose life dragged on between glasses of whiskey-and-soda and of absinthe, poured out to the newcomer fearful stories regarding the atrocious boldness of the robbers in the territory to the west and north of the small town.

'The rule of the Governor of Honan stops here, Monsieur,' he explained. 'To the west of us is the realm of the Yellow Panther, the great robber chief to whom the merchants pay their tribute more willingly than they do to the officials. Even the Government does not know how to treat the Yellow Panther. A short time ago the title of general was offered him by Peking in an attempt

to win him over; but the proud brigand chief declined it.'

'What is the new Governor doing to stop him?' questioned Brooke, who already knew the story of the Yellow Panther from the newspapers.

'T'ieh, the "Iron One"?' questioned the host, pronouncing the name with evident fear. 'I am afraid he will not make much headway against the Yellow Panther. The Governor is merciless and strong. He collects the heads of robbers, wasting no time in asking whether any one is guilty or innocent, but he will find the Yellow Panther quite too much for him.'

Brooke was not made easier by his host's comments on Governor T'ieh. The man's severity was notorious for being both inconsistent and cruel, so that additional confirmation of it did not add to Brooke's feeling of security for Alexandra. The loss of time in Chengchow was most tantalizing and was made all the more unpleasant and dangerous by the fact that Tien Nei-hung had at once gone on to Kaifengfu by a special train. The secretary must have been particularly anxious to arrive there before him, when he could turn him out of his car and leave him to spend the night at Chengchow.

When Brooke finally did arrive at his destination the following morning, he at once hurried to the Governor's *yamen* to take advantage of the arrangements that had been made for him at Peking. But, instead of the chief of the provincial administration receiving him, a *taotai* accorded him an interview.

'Your coming was announced to us from the capital yesterday,' he said respectfully. 'The Governor will be pleased to see you, though he cannot grant you an audience to-day. He will, however, be glad to welcome you to-morrow.'

Brooke was exasperated, for to wait another day would be unbearable.

'But, Lin *Ta-jên*,' he pleaded, deciding suddenly that he must take the *taotai* into his confidence, 'I must see the Governor. I have come on account of the three prisoners who are accused of being the instigators of the murder of the President.'

The *taotai* nodded his head complacently.

'Yes, yes, I know already. The Governor will be interested to hear your views.'

'It is not a question of my views,' replied Brooke warmly, 'but of the decisive, exonerating evidence of a witness. When will the trial be held and sentence pronounced?'

The official ignored his last question.

'I will tell the Governor. Calm yourself, for there is no hurry about this matter. The Governor is busy to-day with other affairs.'

Brooke begged to be allowed to visit the prisoners, but his request was refused with a definite finality.

'The Governor has ordered that no one see them. They are well lodged and properly treated, so that you may make yourself quiet on that point.'

Bitterly disappointed and irritated, Brooke left the *yamen*. That he could not even see Alexandra

to comfort her in her imprisonment seemed the hardest to bear. He decided to find means of letting her know somehow that he was in Kaifengfu, working for her release. The explanation of the *taotai* that the Governor was busy with other things left him the hope that perhaps it would not be too late on the following day to take steps for her rescue.

He wandered disconsolately back to the Chinese inn where he had taken lodgings. There he encountered a merchant from Peking who had talked with him on the way up from Chengchow.

'Have you heard the news?' he asked excitedly. 'This is a great day for Kaifengfu. General Ting returned last evening with five cartloads of robbers' heads. He caught a big gang and made short work of them. They say that the villagers who had allowed the robbers to stop among them paid dearly for it, too, and that they may have gone to make up part of these gruesome spoils.'

'Indeed?' replied Brooke, who had little heart for such tales.

'Oh, yes,' his garrulous companion ran on, 'and the leader of the gang, a favorite lieutenant of the Yellow Panther, was brought back alive by General Ting. He was beheaded this morning in the presence of the Governor, who asked that the robber's liver be given him. The liver is the seat of courage and, if one eats it, the will power and courage of the dead man pass on to him who consumes it.'

The American turned away in disgust and, as he mounted the steps to his room, shuddered at

the thought that this was the man who would be Alexandra's judge. Though such traces of cannibalism in China had been reported to him before, he had given them little credence. It was revolting to be forced to think of them now in the high Government official who was to pass judgment on the life of the one woman in the world he had ever loved.

He threw himself on his bed in despair, resolved to keep the matter as far from his thoughts as possible until the morrow, but he was soon aroused by the servant of the inn with a letter for him. Brooke turned it over in his hand before he broke the seal. The envelope gave no trace of the sender, and the message it contained was quite as mysterious.

> The secret societies are older than China. To fight against them would be like trying to make the Yellow River flow uphill. The ways of the secret societies are undiscoverable, but they respect friendship.

The slip was unsigned, yet it needed no signature to convince Brooke that Tien Nei-hung had been its author. Apparently the private secretary had heard of his conversation with the *taotai* and wished to warn him again. After he had read the peculiar missive once more and had pondered over its contents, he decided that there was another possible interpretation. If the secret societies respected friendship, then surely they would not leave Dr. Ma and Alexandra in the lurch, since they were the allies of the Trias and

the White Lotos. Brooke wondered if this were the meaning which Tien Nei-hung had hoped he would find in the missive; but, realizing that to puzzle over the problem would only add to his anxiety, he destroyed the letter in disgust and strolled out into the street.

The walk raised his spirits somewhat, torn as they were by the devastating inaction when he felt he should be doing something more positive in the interests of Alexandra; even so he was hardly prepared for the greeting of his friend, the Peking merchant, upon his return.

'Another piece of news!' said the gossipy old Chinese. 'Have you heard that the three murderers of the President have been sentenced to be hung?'

The American seized him by the arm with such force that he winced.

'How do you know this?' he snapped fiercely.

'It has been posted at the Governor's *yamen*,' answered the frightened Chinese.

Like a madman Brooke rushed through the crowded streets, leaving his erstwhile companion to stare after him and wonder at the never-ceasing vagaries of the foreigner. Just how he reached the *yamen*, Brooke hardly knew. He found himself, panting and breathless, in front of a proclamation board which confirmed in lengthy text and splashing red seals the awful news.

Feverishly his eyes devoured the report of the trial. Tien Nei-hung was named as public prosecutor and the Governor as judge. It was said that the defendants denied absolutely any connection

with the crime, but that the prosecutor had produced a document which clearly proved their guilt.

The characters blurred in front of his eyes. Only one fact was clear to him: Alexandra was sentenced to death because the scoundrel, Tien Nei-hung, had worked with forged documents. A boundless rage took hold of Brooke. They had lied to him. Tien Nei-hung was a traitor, and the smooth *taotai* had purposely kept the truth from him so that he would not be present at the trial.

He ran into the building, pushing aside the sentry who attempted to stop him.

'I want to speak to the Governor. I want to speak to the *taotai!*' he shouted into the *hao-fang-tzu*, or watchroom. The attendants hesitated for a moment; then, frightened by Brooke's menacing attitude, sent one of their number in to see the Governor. He returned in a moment to report to the enraged American, who was pacing up and down the courtyard, that the Governor could only receive him the next morning.

'And the *taotai?*' shouted Brooke.

'He left on an official mission this afternoon,' reported the *t'ing-ch'ai.*

As the crowd of attendants and soldiers gathered around him, Brooke's reply was silenced by an iron grip on his hand, which forced him to step aside.

'If you want to hear details of the plans for the rescue of your friends,' said a voice in his ear, 'go at once to the Temple of the God of War at the West Gate of the town.'

The American turned in bewilderment to see only the back of a soldier, hurrying away. Though he started to follow him, the man slipped through a door and was gone.

Brooke hesitated but a moment. This might be another trap, he reasoned, but danger made him reckless. If Alexandra were to be saved, then he must be with her friends. He felt the automatic which he had slipped into his pocket in Peking and hurried into the street.

The Temple of the God of War was in the western part of the town, a good half-hour's walk from the Governor's *yamen*. There was no one at the gate and only a few soldiers loitering about in the courtyard. As Brooke entered, one of them, wearing the insignia of a corporal, stepped up to him and, with a formal bow, begged him to come into one of the side wings.

'In the name of the ruler of North China, who administers under the spiritual guidance of the Great One, I greet you,' he said in a tone of deepest respect.

Brooke was astonished, but he had gone through so much during this single day that nothing could put him out of countenance for long.

'I have a letter which will please you,' continued the polite corporal, as they entered the wing of the Temple.

The American seized it and tore it open eagerly, thrilled and excited as he recognized Alexandra's name.

Dearest Stephen. Do not fear for me. I am well, and we shall meet soon. Have confidence in

the one who hands you this and follow implicitly the advice he gives you. I think of you always.

ALEXANDRA

A feeling of infinite relief and happiness surged through him, as he slipped the envelope into his pocket.

The soldier smiled.

'You see, the ways of the secret societies are undiscoverable. How could you think that we should forsake our friends in their adversity? But you Westerners are simple-minded people. With you, a thing is either quite good or quite bad. Perhaps we Chinese have hearts with several layers whose thoughts and emotions you are not able to understand.'

Brooke was perplexed at the familiar ring in the fellow's voice; and even more so, when he recognized, in a second soldier who had followed them into the room, the red hair of his pursuer of the Jade Mount. Instinctively he reached for his coat pocket, but his companion placed a reassuring hand upon his arm.

'You find acquaintances here, do you not?' he grinned. 'Yes, once upon a time we misunderstood you. We were enemies then; but now we are friends and, by order of the ruler of North China, we beg you to be our guest, that danger may be avoided.

The red-haired soldier came up to them.

'Pardon, Your Excellency, I did not understand before,' he said humbly.

Nor did Brooke understand now, but he felt

that this was no time to ask questions. The corporal was speaking again.

'You will find comfort in the room we have prepared for you. Your luggage has already been taken there.'

'But the rescue? I am more concerned for the safety of the three who are imprisoned than I am over my own comfort.'

'It will take place this evening at about ten o'clock,' returned the other. 'A train will take you, as well as the rescued, to a place of safety.'

'A train?' ejaculated Brooke.

'Quite so. Under the very nose of the Government we have great power of action.'

The American felt himself beaten. That the secret societies should have the means to operate a train over a Government railroad for the rescue of three prisoners whom the same Government had condemned surpassed belief; but he had learned his lesson well in the past month. Anything might happen, he felt, as he followed his companion to a simply furnished room in the temple.

'You may make yourself comfortable here,' said the soldier, 'until the time for action arrives. If you wish anything, one of us will always be in the hall.'

Left to his own devices, Brooke threw himself on the bed, not to sleep, which was out of the question with the excitement of the impending events, but to rest for the exertions of the evening. It seemed hours later when the corporal returned with most unexpected news.

'The bloodthirsty Governor has met his reward. He is dead.'

'Murdered?' questioned Brooke in astonishment.

The Chinese shrugged his shoulders.

'To-day at about dusk a dealer brought a small wooden box to the door of the *yamen*, announcing that it contained a number of rare coins. He offered them to the Governor, a recognized connoisseur and collector, and said that he would come for an answer to-morrow. A little later the Governor opened the box. There was a fearful explosion. They say he was quite torn to pieces.'

'Who did it?' pursued Brooke, struck by the composure of the man.

'He who collects hate will be struck by hate,' answered the Chinese. 'Does not the lightning of Heaven also kill without any help from mankind? But if you insist on speaking of those who did the deed, then you may remember that a favorite lieutenant of the Yellow Panther was killed this morning by order of the Governor.'

'Good God!' ejaculated Brooke, sickened for the moment by the merciless revenge of the famous robber. 'Their vengeance is swift, eh?'

'It is also sure,' said the Chinese emphatically.

'But the rescue?' demanded Brooke, shaking off the thought of the death of Alexandra's judge. 'It is nearly ten.'

'And the prisoners are free,' the corporal finished. 'There is little time to lose. They have the longer way to go, and we shall just about meet them at the railway station.'

As they hurried out of the Temple and into the darkened street, they encountered military detachments marching toward the center of the town.

'The soldiers know about the murder, but as yet nothing about the flight,' whispered Brooke's companion.

Near the station a figure slipped out of the darkness and approached his guide, gesticulating wildly and speaking in a dialect which Brooke did not understand.

'There have been difficulties,' said the corporal, turning to Brooke when the man had finished. 'The escape was successful, but the fugitives have been pursued. They could not wait for us and have already left on an engine which stood in readiness. The engine shed from which they started is now occupied by Government soldiers, so that we cannot go there, but a hand-car has been provided, which we shall find a mile down the track on a siding. And here is a letter for you,' he finished, passing an envelope to Brooke, which the American gazed at for a moment in the dimly lighted street and then slipped tenderly into his inside pocket, as he followed his companion along the road that paralleled the track.

They had no difficulty in finding the hand-car, which was well-manned by the corporal's confederates. With the handles once in motion, the men sent the little car along at top speed, taking the down grades at such a pace that Brooke was constantly afraid it would jump the rails. Still it was manifestly impossible to catch the

engine which was carrying Alexandra, for the fugitives had a good fifteen minutes' start and were already well in the lead.

Once they had to stop in the open country for an adjustment, made by the light of a torch, which gave Brooke the opportunity to read Alexandra's note. It consisted of only a few lines hastily written on a loosely folded slip of paper:

> We are being taken to Sianfu in the Province of Shensi, where we shall be safe under the protection of the Association of the Elder Brothers. Do not worry.
>
> ALEXANDRA

Brooke's immediate joy was tempered by gloom as he realized the note meant that Alexandra was not yet cured of her fanatic devotion to the revolutionary cause. He wondered if the Elder Brothers were about to make trouble in the excitable provinces to the west. That, he surmised, would spell chaos — the end of all order in China.

A call from the leader summoned him back to his place, and the car was once more set in motion. The Corporal related to him the details of the escape, as they sped along toward Chenchow.

'All would have gone well,' he said, 'if the Russian had made no difficulty. It seems that, in prison, his mind came back to him. Possibly the atmosphere of the place was better suited to him than the open air. At any rate, he gave lectures on communism through Dr. Ma to any prisoners who would listen to him. When he was told in the hour of deliverance that he was to go to Sianfu to

the Ko Lao Hui, he objected violently, declaring the Elder Brothers were not true revolutionaries. Though they finally persuaded him, valuable time had been lost in the dispute.'

Brooke silently cursed old Goluboff and the stupid Revolutionary Committee that had sent him to accompany Alexandra on her mission.

Toward the end of the night, the hand-car approached Chengchow and was running full speed into the station, when it was suddenly shunted off through an open switch into a seldom-used siding. The drivers tried to stop, but, owing to the high speed, they did not succeed in doing so before they were within sight of a group of armed men, who rushed toward the car.

Acting like a flash, the leader whispered to Brooke:

'We must flee, but you, as a foreigner, will not be in danger. You can remain on the car and declare that we forcibly carried you off.'

The Chinese silently melted into the darkness, as the soldiers rushed up.

'A foreign devil,' called a rough voice, as Brooke was pulled unceremoniously from the hand-car, while he remonstrated and tried with dignity to threaten that he would make complaints to Peking.

The threat was answered by uproarious laughter.

'You may complain, you dog! We shall forward your letter ourselves!' one of the captors called out.

A rifle butt, wielded from behind, suddenly struck him to the ground, after which his hands and feet were tied so tightly that his joints hurt.

Just then a commotion outside the circle of light formed by the torches of the soldiers drew the crowd away from him. As he was left there on the ground to watch the excited group before the station building, his eyes fell upon a three-cornered flag in front of the office of the station-master, which carried in its center a big Chinese character, *Yang*. It reminded him strongly of the old Imperial times, when the troops bore the names of their leaders on their scalloped, triangular banners.

But he had little time for reflection, for the cause of the commotion was soon apparent, when a man, with his hands and feet tied over a bamboo pole, was borne into the circle of light by two of the soldiers, just as the natives carry their pigs to market. At the foot of a lamp post the burden was tossed on the ground and showered with blows and kicks, under which the defenseless victim did not utter a sound.

'It is Red-Hair, the accomplice of the TAIAN murderers! We have you now, you decayed piece of flesh! Descendant of dogs of ancestors! Just wait, you will soon see how we swing a sword up here!' were the cries heard in the wild confusion.

'Whom have you there?' demanded another, who came hurrying up and who was apparently an officer.

'We have caught Red-Hair,' answered one of the soldiers, 'just as he was escaping from the hand-car. Lao-pi overtook him, so that he will receive the fifty-dollar reward offered for his capture.'

'I shall at once hold a court-martial over the

fellow,' announced the officer. 'Where do you come from, Red-Hair? What were you doing on the hand-car? Confess all, then I shall see whether I can treat you leniently.'

The helpless man was stood on his feet, but did not utter a sound.

'The werewolf, whom you call the Great One, is dog-like vermin just as you are,' the officer went on, thrusting his face up close to that of the prisoner.

The only answer the captive made was to spit contemptuously into the leering face of his accuser. This action closed the court and sealed his fate. A great sword was brought. One man held the prisoner by the queue while another swung, and the sword flashed on its terrible mission. A triumphant, scornful yell followed, and the next moment there hung from the lamp post a bleeding head.

Brooke shuddered, and tried to turn away, but was kept by his bonds from rolling over. There from the ghastly gibbet stared down at him the eyes of Red-Hair, the man who had repeatedly tried to take his life, but who, in the last hours, had been his friend and helper. How truly the man of Jade Mount had 'dared to die,' yet how falsely his dance of death had served him! But Brooke was again left little time for thought, as the crowd soon moved over toward him and one of the soldiers shouted:

'Now comes the turn of the second one!'

'He is a foreigner who was with the Trias rascals and must, therefore, be their accomplice,'

came from the man who had dragged him off the hand-car.

'Let me have a look at him,' ordered the officer.

A lamp was flashed in Brooke's face as he lay there, and only now was he able to see what sort of people had seized him. Though they were war-like enough figures, they were not dressed in proper uniforms, so that they could hardly be regular Government troops. The leader had the bearing of an officer and apparently enjoyed the respect of one.

'Foreign master,' he said, 'who are you? What were you doing among the Trias people?'

'I am interpreter at the American Legation in Peking and was carried off forcibly by them.'

Whoops of laughter from those in the circle greeted his answer.

'Where is your passport?' pursued the officer.

'I left a letter of introduction from my Legation in the Governor's *yamen* at Kaifengfu,' Brooke replied, hotly.

'He lies . . . Court-martial . . . Knock off his head . . . The foreign devil would look well beside Red-Hair!' came from the crowd.

'Stop!' commanded the leader, as the men surged in upon Brooke. 'Hands off the guest! You know the orders of the Old Man — all foreigners must be brought before his personal tribunal.'

A feeling of awe seemed to steal over the soldiers at this mention of their chief.

'The rabble to which you belong calls us robbers and our Imperial General the "Yellow Panther,"' said the officer, addressing Brooke. 'You

will see that we "robbers" proceed with fearful severity toward those who seek to drive our people mad and that our justice does not fear the foreigner.'

The American could hardly restrain a smile as he heard the name of the 'Yellow Panther' pronounced. A day which had brought forth so much adventure would be completed in proper style, he thought grimly, by a visit to this feared, despotic robber of the west.

The officer's words had restored order among his men. Brooke was bundled roughly into a Peking cart and, as the day began to dawn in the east, was driven under strong escort out through the uneven streets of the town. Every motion of the springless torture-wagon brought a new ache into his bones to accompany the miserable ache which filled his heart with thinking of what might have happened to Alexandra and of how he had failed utterly to be of any use to her against the unscrupulous machinations of Tien Nei-hung. The constantly recurring feeling that she might, however, have been carried into safe surroundings was the only solace in his extraordinary and perhaps dangerous situation.

CHAPTER XIII

WHITEHEAD TAKES CHARGE

WHITEHEAD waited three days after the report of the escape of the alleged murderers of the President had appeared in sweeping headlines across the 'Peking Daily News.' Then, with no word at all from Brooke and with his anxiety growing unbearable, he opened fiery communication with the police in Kaifengfu. But that city was in such an uproar over the gruesome murder of the Governor that the American could obtain little satisfaction. Finally, after three more days, he received the meager information that Mr. Brooke had called to see the Governor just a few hours before the latter's death, had been told to come back the following day, and had left suddenly, apparently in great anger. An investigation at his inn had revealed the fact that a man in the uniform of a Government corporal had called for and taken away his luggage, saying that the American was to be the guest of the Governor for the remainder of his stay in Kaifengfu. There the trail ended.

Whitehead spent his hours in intermittent fits of gloomy despair and picturesque profanity. He wrote a note to the Prime Minister, demanding that steps be taken to locate his subaltern, and had it immediately set over into Chinese and dispatched by special messenger with instructions to wait for an answer. The result was anything but

satisfactory. The man returned after a time with a note, stating that the Prime Minister could do nothing in the face of the conditions existing at Kaifengfu and that he thought it probable that Brooke had fallen into the hands of the Yellow Panther, in which case he had no doubt been killed.

'The Yellow Panther!' roared Whitehead to the frightened Lai-fu. 'By Heaven, Lai-fu, I'll see this Prime Minister myself. Get me my things and call the carriage. Run, you snail!'

But the Chargé d'Affaires could get no more satisfaction than his messenger had brought. The Prime Minister was polite, quiet, and as agreeable as he possibly could have been to a man who quite passed the bounds of diplomatic amenity in cursing roundly a Government which could not maintain order and which kept the representative of a great foreign power in doubt as to the whereabouts of his subaltern; yet he was obdurate.

'Permit me to offer my apologies, Your Excellency. Nothing has been heard of Mr. Brooke. If for any reason he were forcibly detained in Kaifengfu or even if he were still there, our police would certainly have discovered him. Since he has not been located, it is entirely possible that he has fallen into the hands of the Yellow Panther, a circumstance which I should greatly deplore.'

'Greatly deplore, eh?' snapped Whitehead. 'Let me tell you one thing, Mr. Wang; Mr. Brooke is an American citizen and a member of our Legation staff. If anything happens to him, your Government will hear about it in no uncertain terms.'

As the Chinese shrugged his shoulders, the Chargé continued hotly:

'If you can't do anything about it, I can. I'll conduct a search for him myself and I expect every coöperation from your administration.'

'You may count on it, Your Excellency. But you must realize, as well as I do, the condition in which China flounders at the present time. Our Peking Government, quite frankly, has entirely lost control of the Southern provinces, where TAIAN rules. Only this week the latter has shaken off the young ideologists and has become quite openly a ruling coalition of the secret societies. The Elder Brothers in West China have more power there than we and, added to this, there is now the Revolutionary Committee, which has set up its headquarters in Shanghai. Finally, there is the great robber, the Yellow Panther, who has spread his control over a large section of Honan and the neighboring provinces. China is in revolt, Your Excellency, and my hands are tied.'

'True, true,' muttered Whitehead, realizing the unfortunate accuracy of the Prime Minister's statement of the situation, without in any way being minded to excuse him for his inaction, and remembering also Li Hang-po's warning that he was himself a revolutionary. 'But something has got to be done. Brooke's not dead. You hear? He has not been murdered by the Yellow Panther.'

'I sincerely trust that what you say is true, Your Excellency, but . . .'

His further reply was cut short by the very definite farewell of the American, who turned

promptly away and left the smirking official to himself.

Back at the Legation, he gave immediate orders for the Second Secretary to be dispatched to Kaifengfu, and then sought somehow to busy himself while impatiently awaiting developments. But nothing satisfactory came of it. The Secretary returned to report that the trail ended just where the local police had said it did — in the inn at Kaifengfu.

Whitehead received the news in silence and decided that there was nothing for it but to wait. That Brooke was alive, he felt sure; but the fact that he was prevented from going to his subaltern's relief, wherever he might be held, galled him beyond words. For a moment he thought that Brooke, assisting in the escape of Alexandra, old Goluboff, and Dr. Ma, might have gone off somewhere with them; but, since it had been definitely reported that Ma had assumed active charge of the Revolutionary Committee in Shanghai, he gave this up as a vain hope.

His despair soon turned into an active hatred of the Young China Government at Shanghai, and his disgust with all of the various revolutionary organizations, which had set up their spheres of power all over the country, concentrated on the one organization through which Brooke had fallen into misfortune. Had it not been for the stupid idealists, he reasoned, his assistant would never have met Alexandra and would have avoided the chain of disasters to which he had finally fallen a victim.

He was in no very receptive mood when, a week later, he found a note from Dr. Ma in his mail at breakfast, containing an invitation to be present at a peace conference which had been arranged by the Revolutionary Committee, not only to make peace between North China and the sections of the country in revolt, but to bring together the different revolutionary groups as well. Whitehead threw down the note in disgust.

'Imbecile moon-calves,' he muttered. 'They stir up China with their blatting and then talk about making peace. They'll only end by destroying what little peace we have left in the country.'

But later, on re-reading the invitation in his office, he thought well enough of it to cable the news to Washington that a peace conference had been arranged and that he had been requested to act as arbiter. The answer which arrived several days later was highly flattering. The Department of State expressed much pleasure over the fact that Whitehead had been selected as peacemaker between the various warring parties in China and considered it important that he should appear on this occasion with the full rank of Minister. Consequently it had been decided to promote him from Chargé d'Affaires to the substantive rank.

The jovial-minded Consul of but a few weeks back could not help smiling over the strange turn of fate that had made his advancement directly due to the Young Chinese whom he hated so vigorously. The promotion had come as an entire surprise, and, if only he had known the whereabouts of Brooke, his happiness would have been com-

plete; but with his Canton messmate missing, nothing could seem quite right, so that it was more with sorrow than elation that he gave his orders to Lai-fu to prepare for the journey on which they should leave the following week.

Whitehead arrived in Wei Chia T'un, the village which Dr. Ma had designated as the meeting-place of the conference, in a grave state of mind. The overland journey from Hokow, where he left the railroad to continue the journey in a sedan-chair with a guard of twenty soldiers, added to the weight which Brooke's unsettled fate had already laid heavy upon his heart. Everywhere along the road they traversed, misery was pictured — inundated fields in the early autumn floods; hungry, starving men, women, children, and animals; desolation everywhere. Sitting in the old ancestral hall of the T'ang family where the conference was to convene, the various scenes of the pitiless drama he had witnessed converged into a single emotion of hopelessness. Agitators were at the people constantly. In their miserable condition and state of mind, any change must appear better than their present lot.

'Peace,' he muttered to himself. 'They talk of peace when we are on the brink of a revolution. Nothing but a miracle can stop it.'

He looked up to see Lai-fu grinning at him respectfully from the doorway.

'Oh, you're there, are you?' said the Minister, glad to be dragged out of his mood. 'Well, what is it?'

The smiling Lai-fu came forward with the in-

formation that Tien Nei-hung, confidential secretary to the late President, desired to see him.

'Tien Nei-hung, eh?' scowled Whitehead, dropping into the pidgin English which would insure accurate transmission of his ideas. 'You talkee he no wanchee bobbery my. You talkee anything b'long proper pidgin, Lai-fu. My no wanchee see that No. 1 rascal just now.'

'*Ta-jên* only wanchee talkee "*Tang chia*" (not at home). B'long velly ploper.'

A sudden consciousness of the proprieties of the situation struck the Minister. Of course he must see the man, he reflected, much as he hated him. 'Send him into the reception room, Lai-fu,' he commanded at length.

'Your Excellency,' began Tien Nei-hung, a few moments later when Whitehead rose to greet him in the more formal room of his suite. 'It gives me great pleasure to welcome you as arbiter of the conference which we hope may bring peace to all China.'

Whitehead bowed, standing aloof behind a table in the center of the room. 'My Government is happy to be of service to your country, sir.'

The Chinese bowed in turn, and continued in the oily voice which increased Whitehead's revulsion and distrust of the man. 'I have called,' he said, 'to explain the programme for the conference. You know, of course, that it is the hope of North China to reach a truce with these revolutionaries which will give us a breathing space to organize our armies. With the President dead' — he paused a moment to indulge himself in a pious

glance toward the ceiling — 'the Peking Government is for the moment unsettled. Lacking a titular head, we cannot hope to gather the support of the people behind our soldiers immediately in a movement to crush the Revolution. That will require time. For the moment, we hope only for an armistice.'

'I see,' said Whitehead. 'And so you expect to call a truce for a month or so?'

'If possible, Your Excellency, if possible,' replied the Chinese with a gesture which might have expressed doubt of the scheme's success.

'And the secret societies,' pursued Whitehead. 'Do you expect them to keep the terms of any armistice you arrange?'

'It will be difficult, Your Excellency,' admitted Tien Nei-hung. 'But we shall try. Perhaps after a week of conversations under Your Excellency's splendid guidance, we may be able to reach some concrete agreement.'

Whitehead looked sharply at the man, struck by the insincerity in his tone, which seemed to express lack of confidence in the plan he was advancing. Tien Nei-hung had, he knew, been in league with the secret societies. Had the rascal now thrown that affiliation over in an effort to seize the Government at Peking for himself? There was more behind that smiling mask of a face than could easily be read. 'You expect the conference to last at least a week, then,' he said.

'Oh, yes,' replied the Chinese easily. 'The first few days will be taken up with searching for a common ground upon which we can reach an

agreement. My Government at Peking wishes me to prolong the sessions as much as possible in order that they may have a better opportunity to prepare. For while we are in conference, an armistice will be in effect at all events.'

Whitehead was silent, deep in thought. That Tien Nei-hung was keeping something from him, he was sure. This man, ambitious to become the head of the Government himself, spoke too easily of something which Whitehead knew to be impossible. That the secret societies would ever consent to an armistice, he thought extremely unlikely. Tien Nei-hung must know that as well as he, since he was, or had been, their ally. And it was ridiculous to suppose that a week's delay while the delegates talked matters over could make a great deal of difference in the fortunes of any one of the contending factors. No, there was something behind it. Something he did not understand. Nor did Tien Nei-hung seem eager to pursue the matter further. Having delivered his message to Whitehead, he ceremoniously bowed himself out, leaving the Minister to ponder his problem alone. He was still debating the matter when Lai-fu entered bearing a European visiting-card. Whitehead glanced at it and gave vent to his mingled resentment and displeasure:

'Alexandra Goluboff! What the devil does that woman want from me? Throw her out, Lai-fu, and you needn't be polite about it, either in the European or the Chinese fashion. You talkee her my no can see, no have got time.'

After a moment, Lai-fu returned.

'Missy talkee must wanchee see *Ta-jên* all about Master Blooke,' he said gravely. 'She savey all 'bout this pidgin.'

'Brooke! What did she say about Mr. Brooke?'

'She talkee only must wanchee see *Ta-jên* all 'bout Master Blooke,' Lai-fu repeated, shaking his head.

'Bring her in,' said the American gruffly. Much as he felt he should hate the woman, she, of all people, should know something of Brooke. He rose and stood stiffly behind the writing-table.

As Alexandra Goluboff entered, his demeanor left little doubt in her mind as to the reception he intended according her. She faltered for a moment and colored at his glance, which was almost rude. She was tired, so tired, and wanted only to bring about the deliverance of the man she loved — and his closest friend was going to make it unutterably hard for her. He was speaking now.

'You have something to tell me?' The voice was so harsh that she drew herself up proudly under its lash.

'I have induced Dr. Ma, the leader of the peace delegation from Shanghai, to propose that you should be invited to take part at the conference,' she said, her voice firm and the color in her cheeks the only sign of her emotion.

'I have accepted the invitation and am here,' answered Whitehead stiffly. 'Please come to the point.'

'That belongs to the point. I have done this to give you a chance to assist in rescuing Mr. Brooke.'

Whitehead paled.

'What do you know of Brooke?' he demanded, leaning across the table. The girl smiled to herself. He had a vulnerable spot, this man of iron.

'I know a few things that I beg you to listen to quietly. Mr. Brooke is in the hands of the Yellow Panther, who has been invited to the conference as well as yourself. Since this robber chief dominates a large territory, no general peace can be made in China without his coöperation.'

'Then the Prime Minister told the truth,' said the American half to himself.

'Perhaps he lied to you all the same,' suggested Alexandra, 'for, when he told you, he could hardly have known what I have managed to find out. Yes, Mr. Brooke is in the hands of the robbers and is well treated now, though at first he was roughly handled.'

'Then he is safe?' questioned the man anxiously.

'Yes, he is safe.'

There was a moment's silence, broken by the American.

'I have been rude,' he said. 'Please sit down and tell me what you know.'

The girl smiled imperceptibly, as she took the chair he indicated.

'The story is long,' she said, 'but, briefly, on the night when we were sentenced to death in Kaifengfu, we escaped on a locomotive. Mr. Brooke followed with a party of our friends on a hand-car, which was captured by soldiers belonging to the Yellow Panther. When the others fled,

and Stephen — Mr. Brooke was captured, one of his comrades, called the "Dear Friend," did not leave him. This man is the favorite pupil of the Great One, whose spirit has vitalized the TAIAN movement. He mingled with the captors and managed to get one of the robber waistcoats which enabled him to pass as a follower of the brigand chief. Mr. Brooke was taken to the headquarters of the Yellow Panther, where he and his luggage were examined before the officer reported on him to his chief. They found no papers to guide them and were about to give up the search, when one of the soldiers discovered a small Chinese seal in the pocket of an extra coat which Mr. Brooke had in his traveling-case and handed it to the officer. He in turn slipped out of the group and took it immediately to one of the inner rooms, where he submitted it to the confidential aide who accepts all messages for the Yellow Panther and receives and passes upon all requests for interviews with him. One glance at it was enough for this young man. He rushed excitedly into the courtyard and embraced the captive with tears in his eyes.'

'And the young man . . .' interrupted Whitehead.

'Was Li Hang-po, for the seal was that which his father, Li Kuo-fa, had given Mr. Brooke in Kueilin after the affair in Jade Mountain. Of course, safety was now assured him, but not his freedom. The Yellow Panther treated him like a son when Li Hang-po took him in to see him, inasmuch as Li Kuo-fa was the brigand chief's closest and most valued ally and sworn blood-

brother, but, for political reasons, flatly refused to release him. He was even forbidden to communicate with any one.'

Whitehead's happiness at learning that his friend was safe fast melted his hatred of this woman who, he felt, had led Brooke into so much danger. His inner voice had not misled him this time either, for Brooke lived and was well. Pleased with himself, he stroked his gray mustache and, as he did so, his eyes rested upon Alexandra, unconsciously taking on an expression of kindness. But quickly he caught himself and reassumed his look of severity as he questioned: 'That is all?'

'All?' repeated the girl, bewildered for the moment by this unusual man. 'No, not quite all. The Yellow Panther will be here to-morrow, and you will have an opportunity of asking for Mr. Brooke's freedom. I am sure he will not wish to incur your displeasure.'

'She is a devil of a fellow, though, this woman,' thought Whitehead. 'It's a pity she isn't a man. Something could have been made of her. She looks deuced pretty, too.' Again that enervating kindness was creeping into his eyes, so that he had to pull himself together once more. 'But she is a revolutionary, a trouble-breeder. I'll show her what an experienced man thinks of her doings,' he said to himself. However, just as he was about to speak, Alexandra forestalled him.

'One thing more, sir. Tien Nei-hung, who is to take the chair at the meeting to-morrow, will not deal fairly with you. You are invited that you

may be an arbiter, but Tien Nei-hung will not tell you the truth about the real proceedings at the conference. He, who has for a long time been the confidant of the Trias, pretends to be a loyal official of the Government in Peking, while in reality he is working for the success of the Revolution. To-morrow he will have to unmask before the various revolutionary parties, but he will not want to do that before you. Consequently, you are to have a Chinese interpreter who has been ordered to translate all the utterances of Tien Nei-hung in such a way as to make him appear loyal to Peking.'

Whitehead's gratitude overcame him. So that was what Tien Nei-hung's mask had concealed!

'I thank you, my dear child,' escaped from him, before he could stop his words. He bit his lips, but it was of no use. He stood up and, crossing to the girl, extended his hand. 'You have done me a great service. Lai-fu shall go with me to-morrow and interpret what that rascal Tien Nei-hung has to say. Then . . . then we shall see about Brooke.'

As Alexandra started to get up, Whitehead motioned her to remain. He paced the floor for a moment, a conflict going on within him, for the prejudices of fifty years were being swept away by this mere slip of a girl. Once he stood still and looked at her, then began pacing the room again; while she, bewildered by his action, sat watching him with embarrassment. Suddenly he stopped close to her chair.

'Why do you stir up rebellion in China?'

'You overestimate my influence, Mr. Whitehead.'

'I express myself badly. But I don't understand it all. You seem in other ways to be quite sensible. How is it that you have such mad ideas? . . . No, I have said it badly again,' he apologized, as Alexandra looked at him with surprise.

'I know your history — Brooke has told me. I understand well enough that every one is the product of his environment, but still you have two eyes in your head. Don't you see what is being done in China by this TAIAN swindle? Why associate yourself with it? Do you want to make a rubbish-heap of the whole country?'

'I only want the Chinese people to be happy,' said the girl hesitantly.

'Happy? Good Lord, don't you see that just the opposite will result? Look about you, my dear child. Everywhere murders and killing. The whole country is in boundless confusion. It is much easier to demolish anything than to put it together again. Do you imagine that all the different parties and groups with their utterly different ideas will be easily brought again under one hat, especially under a communistic one? The Chinese people will not be grateful for the Jacobite bonnet you are offering them. They are accustomed to another sort of headgear. This whole thing began in the South, in Canton. Your friends, the Young China communists, proclaimed a TAIAN Government there. They considered themselves well in the saddle, but they came a cropper long ago. In their stead there now rules

quite openly in the whole of the South a band of criminals. Your friends, with nothing more to say in that region, have now looked for a more favorable field in Shanghai. What they have established there may be a model communist state, but its boundaries do not go beyond the town. Your Young Chinese say with pride, because the Chinese banks belong to them: "He who has the money has the power." That is sheer nonsense. What can you do without the people? For this reason I prefer the famous Great Elder Brother at Sianfu. He is an uneducated blockhead, it is said, and a former corporal of the Government army; but he has the well-united masses of the densely populated West solidly behind him. Now the Young China gentlemen, who may be connoisseurs of the Marxian doctrines but who do not understand this country in the least, think that the society of the Elder Brothers is an organization akin to theirs and with similar tenets; but I assure you that is foolish chatter. The Elder Brothers may preach fraternity as much as they like, but this has nothing to do with communism, absolutely nothing. And do you really believe that Tien Nei-hung will proclaim communism, just to please you? He will not, for he has other plans in his head. Plans in which, believe me, Miss Goluboff, you and the others who, perhaps sincerely enough, think you are doing something for China with all your nonsense, will play little part.'

Whitehead had grown very angry. His face was red, as he stopped for a moment to catch his breath after this unusually long tirade. Alexandra considered his words.

'I do not know exactly what you mean,' she said at length. 'At the conference to-morrow we shall proclaim the Revolutionary Government as the ruling body of China. Each separate unit will have its voice, and the authority will be concentrated in a political bureau giving representation to the various groups. Tien Nei-hung, who comes here as the delegate from North China, will be but one voice in a dozen.'

'I don't believe it,' snapped Whitehead. 'Oh, I don't doubt for a minute that what you have just told me is the plan agreed on,' he added more loudly, as Alexandra started to protest. 'But you don't understand the Chinese as I do. If you were older, or a man, you would realize that Tien Nei-hung is an ambitious scoundrel. You say that he meant to deceive me and appear still as a supporter of the Peking Government. I'll wager you a tidy sum that he intends to deceive you as well. Tien Nei-hung is a clever fellow, don't mistake that. And being clever, he realizes that the scheme which all you ideologists have in mind leaves him only as one cog in too large a wheel. Do you know what I think?' Whitehead dragged a chair to the table and sat down opposite the girl, his face tense with emotion as he expressed the conviction which had just come over him. 'I think that the rascal intends, before that conference is finished, to proclaim himself head of a revolution backed by the Trias and the other bloodthirsty devils which will leave all of you entirely out of it. Then where is your "peace and happiness in China"?'

'Oh, no, no,' protested the girl, rising. 'Believe me, sir, all that would be entirely contrary to the sacred vow which all of us took at Jade Mount.'

'What does Tien Nei-hung care for a vow?' demanded Whitehead contemptuously, 'if by breaking it he can become President of China?'

The girl sat down again, her face troubled by the tragic possibility which Whitehead had put into her mind.

'If what you believe should prove true,' she said, almost to herself, 'then hope rests only in the Yellow Panther and the Elder Brother.'

'Eh?' said the man, pricking up his ears. 'You don't think that the Yellow Panther and the Elder Brother would join Tien Nei-hung?'

'I think,' replied the girl slowly, 'that they would have joined our movement in the end, but we've never been sure of them. You see,' she said, looking up into Whitehead's face, 'both of them hate the Trias and the secret societies which commit the murders. So do we, and we knew that the Yellow Panther at least would never join any compact of which the Trias is a part. Still, we have felt that the Trias was necessary to get our movement under way. Then we hoped to drop them. At the meetings all of them will be present, though the Great Elder Brother and the Yellow Panther may not be here to-morrow. But I do not believe either of them will allow Tien Nei-hung to proclaim himself head of the Government.'

'Still, there's a chance of it?' pursued Whitehead.

'Yes, there's a chance of that, too,' replied the

girl. 'It is sure that should Tien Nei-hung wish to proclaim himself President with the backing of the secret societies, we could not stop him. Only the Elder Brother and the Yellow Panther might do that.' She stopped for a moment and then continued passionately, 'Oh, Mr. Whitehead, it would be a terrible end to all of our dreams for China! It all seemed so easy, such a glorious work when Michael Goluboff and I came first. The secret societies were easily manageable then. But now — now they've got out of hand. The misery all around us is taken advantage of by them to incite the masses. The agents of the Trias have been working for weeks to increase the suffering. Their purpose is to drive the unhappy folk to absolute despair and so prepare them for any mad action. Oh, sometimes I wish that I had never come!'

The girl broke into tears and covered her face. She had said more than she would have wished. But Whitehead took both her hands and said with unmistakable feeling in his voice:

'You see! And these people are your allies. What will this revolution lead to? I see two possibilities: the first is chaos. If this is avoided, the deliverance of China will come through a return to her ancient views. This would make difficulties also and could not last permanently, but it would be the lesser evil of the two. In the second eventuality, the Elder Brothers of the West will be the dominating element. The Trias are scoundrels. The Great One may be a true pupil of Laotze, but Laotze taught that happiness for man-

kind was to be looked for in the simple, original forms of life.'

'Forgive me,' answered Alexandra softly, her composure recovered, 'if I do not yet give up hoping for the third eventuality. I cannot yet renounce the thought that it will be possible to set up in China a form of government corresponding with the ideal we have in mind. But if this were proved impossible, then I too should prefer a thousand times to take the path leading back into antiquity rather than to see the inner dissolution of this great nation. Yet, whichever it is going to be, I shall leave China.'

The last sentence was hardly audible and was uttered with such an accent of personal pain that Whitehead felt he was hearing the cry of distress of a tortured soul. He patted her hand clumsily, hoping to help.

'What is it that is really troubling you? Tell me about it. I know I am an old growler and may not agree with your political opinions, but we have a mutual friend, Brooke . . .'

'No, Stephen must never know it!' the words came passionately and quickly. 'You might help me if you would; but you must not tell Mr. Brooke.' With that she drew out a letter, which she handed to Whitehead to read.

The American looked quickly at the signature, then read the letter carefully. It was an impassioned appeal from Dr. Ma for the girl's love, which he recognized had already been given to Brooke. Ecstasy and despair were mingled in it, and, as Whitehead slowly folded it and handed it

back to the girl, he looked at her questioningly.

'And you?'

She avoided his glance as her tears overflowed again. Whitehead knew enough.

'But nobody can compel you.'

'Compel me? No!' Alexandra shook her head energetically. 'But my adopted father wishes it. He has implored me to let my engagement be announced at the end of the conference, when the communistic TAIAN is to be proclaimed for the whole of China. He wants it done as a sign of international fraternity.'

'Have you ever given Ma any intimation which might entitle him to speak to you in this way?'

The girl's cheeks colored. Whitehead saw that she was embarrassed. At last there came like a breath over her lips:

'I do not quite know.'

'Then, of course . . .'

'No, no, you must not think that,' cried the girl. 'I did it in a moment of greatest danger that night on the Kwangsai when Stephen had been fettered and pushed to the edge of the deck. As they were just going to throw him into the river, I whispered to Ma: "I cannot love a man who permits a murder!" I had to do it. Nothing else would have saved him. From that hour Ma believed, without my having given him any other sign or indication, that I felt more than friendship for him.'

'And you don't?' questioned Whitehead again.

'Of course I don't,' replied the girl. 'He is my friend, and I like him. That is why this letter

hurts me so. But do not tell Stephen when you see him. I shall leave as soon as the conference is over.'

'I do not promise anything,' answered Whitehead, 'but here are my two hands, and I shall help you. You will have to leave the manner of doing it to me.'

'No, no!' Alexandra interrupted him. 'Who am I to deserve your help after all I have done contrary to your ideas? The world I have built up for myself has been shaken and may collapse around me to-morrow. Even if it should persist, it will not be the victory I had dreamed of. But Mr. Brooke is not to see my defeat, for I could not bear his pity.'

Pale and with tired eyes, Alexandra stood before the Minister, who looked at her with a kindly, understanding smile and then accompanied her to the door with something more of cordiality than mere politeness required. For a moment Whitehead felt the pressure of her hands in his and then, before he was able to speak, she was gone, leaving him wrapped in thought, happier and yet sadder than he had been in many years. He winked to keep back the tears which clouded his eyes and, shaking himself together, shouted into the corridor to cover his confusion:

'Lai-fu, Lai-fu! Where the devil is my tea?'

CHAPTER XIV

THE GOD OF THE WATERS

THE following morning at ten o'clock three quavering trumpet blasts on long Chinese tubæ announced from the hill of the ancestral hall of the T'angs, the beginning of the peace conference. In the great open hall, assembled about a long table, sat this strange group of men whose purpose was to devise a lasting Government for China. Only Whitehead was present as a disinterested spectator.

Tien Nei-hung, who was to preside, invited Whitehead to a seat beside him. His smug smile of welcome sickened the sturdy American Minister, who longed to tell the rascal to his face that he was not deceived by his manner. But if the affable secretary noticed anything unsympathetic in Whitehead's demeanor, he gave no sign.

'Your Excellency's interpreter will occupy the chair next to you,' he said, nodding toward a black-robed Chinese, who was standing silently near them. 'Although this will be merely a preliminary session, I have taken the liberty of providing him in order that you may lose nothing on account of the intricacies of the language.'

Whitehead controlled his temper with difficulty.

'Thank you,' he said shortly. 'The young man will not be needed, Mr. Tien. Ignorant of your splendid thoughtfulness, I have brought my

servant with me. He will take care that nothing is missed, I assure you.'

The slightest trace of annoyance flickered across the face of the chairman, though it was gone in an instant, as he saw from the set of Whitehead's jaw that it was useless to protest.

'Your Excellency knows best,' he said with a shrug, as he turned away, and Whitehead reflected bitterly that it made little difference. After all, what could he do if the delegates chose as their government a coalition of the relentless secret societies? He looked about uneasily for the Yellow Panther and the Elder Brother. They were not among the group which was introduced to him.

As they took their places around the long table, he glanced down toward the end where Alexandra Golúboff sat between her foster-father and Dr. Ma. Whitehead softened as he saw her. The tired eyes and the lines about the mouth revealed only too surely the tremendous strain under which she was working.

'Poor child,' he muttered. 'Poor misguided child!'

Further reflection was cut short by the voice of the deceitful Tien Nei-hung, who had risen beside him to open the meeting. Immediately, the faithful Lai-fu was at his master's ear, translating the secretary's words.

'Properly drawn credentials have been deposited for South China by the High Priest of the Monastery of Poyunkuan, for the Republic of Shanghai by Dr. Ma, and for North China by

Tien Nei-hung. In the Dear Friend we greet the representative of the Great One, the enlightened spiritual guide of the TAIAN movement. As guests, having the right to vote, we welcome the delegates of the Communistic Committee in Chita, Mr. Goluboff and his daughter. The presence of the American Minister, His Excellency Mr. Whitehead, has been requested to afford us the valued opportunity of asking his advice. Not yet arrived, but later expected, are the Great Elder Brother, representative of the neighboring State of West China, and the Yellow Panther — I mean to say General Han — who controls a large territory in North Central China. The Great Elder Brother has been on a pilgrimage to offer sacrifice on the holy mountain, Tai Shan, and should arrive at any moment. General Han, too, has promised to be here this morning. In the meantime, however, I think we may begin. As you all know, it is the purpose of the meeting to make peace between North China and the three revolutionary governments as well as to agree upon a uniform system of administration for the whole country. The first speaker will be Dr. Ma, the representative from Shanghai.'

'Clever,' mused Whitehead to himself, as the slight figure of Dr. Ma arose. 'Damned clever. He'll get the visionaries out of the way in the early sessions, giving the conference every appearance of fairness, and then stampede the meeting for the secret societies.' Powerless to act in what he saw to be a hopeless situation, he sat back in rage to listen closely to Lai-fu's translation.

Dr. Ma made a long, fiery harangue, in which he praised the communist ideas and recommended their acceptance for the whole of China, closing with the words:

'Our Shanghai State is small, but it is exemplary. Its regulations can be extended at once over all the country. We have put into practice the most modern doctrines, from which our lacerated country will derive wealth and new strength. We revolutionaries in the South and West and our secret allies in the North have made TAIAN our battle-cry. TAIAN can signify only the Communist Government.'

When he had finished his address, there was an icy silence, broken only by the applause of Michael Goluboff, the vigorous old revolutionary to whom incarceration in the prison of Kaifengfu had restored his former power of mind and liveliness.

From across the table the strong, tall figure of the High Priest of Poyunkuan, the South China delegate, rose, and in Whitehead's ear the voice of Lai-fu whispered that this was the first of the secret societies' representatives.

Whitehead nodded and leaned forward to watch the man's face. The comedy was over, he reflected; the tragic actors would now make their entrances.

'I respect and admire the tenets of the previous speaker,' said the priest drily, 'but after all it is a question of power. It is not the wise tortoise who rules over the animals, but the strong tiger. We are willing to cast our vote for Tien Nei-hung as

the head of the Government, if North China, which has always lagged behind, will bring herself abreast of our progressive administration.'

A cheer went up from the representatives of the secret societies present as the name of Tien Nie-hung was mentioned, and Whitehead sat back in dismay at the obviously 'framed' demonstration which followed. Could it be possible that Tien Nei-hung would dare thus early to proclaim himself head of the Government? Out of the uproar, the high-pitched voice of Dr. Ma was heard protesting, reminding the delegates of the agreement to which they had solemnly bound themselves in Jade Mount. Whitehead leaned forward tensely in his chair. Ma was right. He was appealing to the only sense which could save China from being thrown into chaos, if, indeed, Tien Nei-hung meant to execute his *coup d'état.* He might be a simple fool, a visionary, but in him at that moment the American saw the last waning hope for peace in China. If he failed . . . But the prospect was too terrible. Nervously he moved in his chair, while Lai-fu whispered his translation of the Chinese words in his ear.

'The secret societies are to be only the pioneers of the Revolution,' he objected. 'To allow them to dictate the form of a national government is against the holy agreement. It is something quite reactionary. Moreover, it would be frowned upon by the Great One, to whom we owe the spiritual sanction of our mission. The success of our cause depends upon his continuing approval. Without it . . .'

The obvious impression which his words were making upon the delegates was suddenly broken as Michael Goluboff, sensing the crisis, sprang to the side of Dr. Ma and loosed a flood of unintelligible Russian. It was the turning-point. An interpreter sought to translate some of his words, but the delegates listened impatiently, not heeding the appeal of Dr. Ma, which was now lost upon them.

'The fool!' muttered Whitehead. 'Why doesn't some one stop him?' He looked hopefully to Alexandra Goluboff, who, sensing the situation, was vainly attempting to halt the old man's tirade. Tien Nei-hung finally rose to his feet as the Russian stopped breathless and sank back in his chair. A hush hung over the assembly. Whitehead stirred uneasily. Why didn't Alexandra address the meeting?

'We have heard the various opinions advanced here,' said Tien Nei-hung with his characteristic duplicity, correctly interpreted to Whitehead by the watchful Lai-fu. 'And despite the objections of the delegate from Chita and the representative of Shanghai, I believe it to be the sense of the assembly that I should have the honor of leading the new Government which is to bring peace to China.'

Cheers broke out from the delegates as Whitehead thought to rise and protest. It was all over now, he reflected, as he gazed upon the uproar — all over and he had been powerless to interfere. He looked to the end of the table where Michael Goluboff, Alexandra, and Dr. Ma sat si-

lent during the demonstration. Whitehead noted sadly the deepening lines about the girl's mouth. 'I wonder if she realizes,' he mused.

His contemplation was interrupted by the sudden entrance of a breathless captain of the guard.

'Your Excellencies,' he reported, 'there is an uproar in the hamlet below. The refugee camps have risen in revolt, invaded the village, and stormed the *yamen* of the district magistrate. They have become rebellious in consequence of mad rumors. A man was caught tampering with the dike during the night and, when questioned under pressure, declared that he was but obeying the behests of high-placed persons, who had commanded him to undo the work of repairing and let the stream pour out over the country again. The crowd believes it and is now calling for revenge. They want to kill the authorities. It is no revolution, but simply a rebellion of the mob against law and order.'

Standing in the broad doorway, from where tracts of the open country were visible to a great distance, the captain had given his report in hurried, excited words.

'Look, Your Excellencies,' he added, as he pointed to the hamlet below, 'there are flames there already. They must have set fire to the *yamen*.'

All the conference members rushed to the entrance. The sounds of wildly beaten gongs came up from the little town below, the alarm which warned the population of danger. Single mus-

ketry shots sounded from the narrow streets like the sharp cracking of whips, punctuated now and again by the dull boom of a small gun that was being used against the crowd.

Then a dense throng of shouting, protesting people began streaming out of one of the alleys of the little town straight in the direction of the ancestral hall.

'Your Excellencies need not fear,' called the captain. 'I know my duty, and my soldiers would rather die than allow the crowd to molest you.'

The guard, consisting of one company, was deployed in open line for defense. At the command of the captain, the soldiers fired several volleys over the heads of the crowd, which frightened the excited country-folk and cleared the streets below.

'We have turned them back and now we shall take the hamlet,' cried the officer, as he gave the order to advance. Yelling wildly and shooting recklessly, the soldiers rushed down the slope into the village.

Whitehead joined the other delegates in the entrance of the ancestral hall to watch the proceedings below. As he started to go down from the doorway to investigate further, there was sudden confusion in the village. In the midst of the irregular firing they heard a few sharp, well-timed volleys and the soldiers, who had gone forth so boastfully a few moments before to protect the members of the conference from the rabble, broke and came running panic-stricken back up the hill toward the temple. A moment after the firing

ceased, the cause of the guards' rout revealed itself in a column of men, wearing the soldiers' jackets of the old imperial times, which debouched in ever-increasing numbers from the entrance to the village nearest the hall of the T'angs. Armed to the teeth, they advanced with fixed bayonets, as though ready to strike.

'The Yellow Panther!' shouted some one; and at these words the spirit of panic which had obsessed the soldiers seized the delegates. Tien Nei-hung was the first to show the white feather and disappear into the temple. His example was followed by the others, so that Whitehead was left alone, a glimmer of hope welling up within him. Perhaps this robber chieftain would still prove China's savior.

'The Yellow Panther will hardly want to kill a foreign Minister,' he observed, turning to Lai-fu, who had remained at his side, imperturbable as ever. 'Anyhow, I wanted to talk to him about Brooke and, now that the others have decamped, I can do so without being disturbed.'

As he swung further round, he discovered that the Dear Friend had also remained near him; but there was no time for conversation now.

The column of men marched up the hill, halted and smartly opened to form two well-dressed lines facing each other. As they brought their rifles to the ground with the same fine military precision, two men rode through the avenue of keen-faced soldiers. Whitehead's astonishment at seeing that one of them was a European changed to exuberant joy when he recognized that this outrider for the

bandit chief was none other than Brooke. As they discovered each other simultaneously, the rider literally threw himself from his horse to greet his chief.

'Thank God, boy, thank God!' muttered the older man, as he thumped his assistant on the back until the other laughingly called a halt to this vigorous mode of welcoming him.

'It's good to see you, sir; and this is Li Hang-po.' Further greetings and congratulations were interrupted by the appearance of a green sedan-chair, just coming out of the hamlet.

'The Yellow Panther,' explained Brooke to his chief. 'Now you will see what a Chinese robber looks like; and you will see a wonder!'

The sedan-chair, surrounded by an escort with jackets of more than the usual brilliance, was being carried up the slope with much show of ceremony. As it was carefully set down at the portal, servants, who seemed to appear from nowhere, hurried forward to help the occupant out. A delicately built old man with noble features stepped carefully over the litter-bar and, leaning upon an attendant, slowly climbed the stairs to the broad entrance. Halfway up he turned round and called;

'Pao-ting, take good care of my books.'

'That is the Yellow Panther,' whispered Brooke. 'I think you will now prefer to call him General Han.'

With a solemn, dignified, courtly bow, lowering his closed hands from the forehead down to the knees, the old man approached Whitehead and

the Dear Friend, who was still standing smiling beside him.

'There has been a misunderstanding,' he apologized. 'My warriors did not want to harm the soldiers; but I could not allow the suffering people to be goaded further. The villagers are in the right, for some unknown evil-doers damaged the repairs on the dikes, just to increase and capitalize the sufferings of the population. Those peasants who started up here were coming only to lodge their complaints and to ask the honored members of the peace conference to go to the neighboring village of Wang Chia T'un, where it appears a great miracle has happened, which is considered by the people to be a good omen. I am sorry that the necessarily demonstrative approach of my warriors has driven away the conference delegates.'

Whitehead had been gazing in astonishment and admiration at this noble old man, who was commonly known as the Yellow Panther, the chief of a gang of brigands, and who now turned out to be a highly educated man of letters with most polished and attractive manners. Yet he was still in doubt as to the man's political ideas. The Yellow Panther, noticing the question in the other's eyes during his momentary hesitancy before answering, continued, with evident amusement in his smile:

'You had pictured to yourself the robber leader of Central China somewhat differently? A few words more, and you will understand me. I want to be the doctor of my unhappy country and for

that reason I make use of the accepted methods of medicine. China is suffering from serious inflammations. In such cases doctors are in the habit of putting moxa on the skin and burning it, even if it does cause some temporary pain. This same I do with China. My soldiers often behave themselves very roughly and brutally, although I try constantly to restrain them, but they are the moxa which produces the salutary counter-effect below the surface. I have been invited here to a peace conference. If I see that new, strong blood has developed in our people, then I shall remove the burning moxa. My soldiers call me the imperial commander-in-chief. Am I a monarchist? I look for political wisdom in our old books and there I find that the monarchies with their hereditary rights and inalienable privileges have always harmed China. Am I a republican? All these distinctions are but empty words. The real problem is to establish a firm authority of the State. Because of the loosening effect of radical foreign ideas, we can only attain this again through the superstition of the unenlightened masses. China is not Europe and not America. Yet what is good for you will, in the end, be good for us too, but our way to it is different and long. Because of the disturbances of the last few months, we shall have to begin all over from the starting-point. That is why my soldiers call me the imperial general.'

A sigh of relief escaped Whitehead. 'Thank God,' he said fervently, as, to the surprise of Brooke and apparently of General Han, he

seized the old man's hand in both his own and pressed it. 'You have saved China from chaos,' he explained. 'Just before your arrival, this conference had decided to set up a government of the secret societies under Tien Nei-hung. You have come just in time, sir. I was only fearful that you, too, might wish to join this damnable TAIAN movement to spread terror through the land.'

'Never fear,' smiled the benign old man. Further conversation was abruptly halted by cries from outside, and they looked up to see three soldiers, with white bands on their arms, approaching by a side path, more or less driving Tien Nei-hung and the High Priest of Poyunkuan before them.

'Come in, Tien Hsien-shêng,' said one of these soldiers. 'You should not be afraid of the Yellow Panther. You invited him yourself. And you too, High Priest, enter the hall. The Yellow Panther will not send you at once to eternal peace.'

The three soldiers came in, keeping Tien Nei-hung and the High Priest between them.

'You are the Yellow Panther, are you not?' simply and good-naturedly continued the soldier who had spoken outside. 'You, sir, I greet as the American Minister; and you, Dear Friend, I know already. Have you eaten your rice?'

The Yellow Panther stepped up politely to the speaker.

'Great Elder Brother, you come late.'

Now Whitehead knew who the newcomer was — the ruler of the far-stretching and, in places, densely populated three western provinces of

China; the chief of the Ko Lao Hui, that mysterious secret society whose views, customs and doctrines have their roots in remotest Asiatic antiquity, but upon which, nevertheless, the modern revolutionary movement thought it might look as an ally. If he had been surprised in discovering in the brigand chief an accomplished man of letters of the old school, he was now no less astonished to see that the ruler of West China was a man of quite common mien. Where were the qualities of a leader to be found in his appearance and bearing? The unshaven face with its flat nose was round and had coarse features, the neck was short and the figure stunted. The fact that the man wore the ordinary soldier's uniform might correspond with his social views; but it left him with no marks to distinguish him outwardly from his comrades, not even cleanliness. The one noteworthy feature about him was his eyes, which allowed one to look into the soul of a child.

Strange representatives these of just as strange groups: the ruler of a state of robbers, who carried on robbery for political reasons and who wished to help his country to recovery by traveling the road of reaction; Tien Nei-hung, the cowardly scoundrel, the highest official of North China, in reality the confidant and helpmate of the South China rebels; the High Priest of Poyunkuan, the representative of the league of criminals of the Trias, now reigning in South China; the Great Elder Brother, the master of West China; and, lastly, the Dear Friend, that individual who was always quiet and smiling and who was known by the

others to be the favorite pupil of the Great One, that mysterious spiritual leader of the whole of the TAIAN movement.

'China, you will always remain for us Occidentals an unfathomable mystery!' thought Whitehead.

'You have already begun,' said the Great Elder Brother with simple directness, 'but some are missing. The delegate of Shanghai is not here. That does not matter, though, for the State of Shanghai is of no importance. . . . So, then, Tien Hsien-shêng, you want to become Emperor? I have already heard it. You need not contradict me. I well know that the title is different to-day, for the new fashion calls it "President." We brothers in the West have no titles at all. We are all brothers, and I, their chosen chief, on whom they have imposed responsibility, will be called nothing but Great Elder Brother.'

Tien Nei-hung had recovered. With an ill-assumed air of dignity he requested those present to take their seats; but the Great Elder Brother did not let parliamentarianism get so far.

'Why should we talk so much? The best one is to lead the people. We are all agreed on that. The best one is loved by the gods. If you are the best and if you have a good conscience, then show it. Come down to the river and pray to the God of the Waters to mitigate the sufferings of the people.'

Tien Nei-hung wanted to refuse, but the Yellow Panther welcomed the proposal of the Great Elder Brother with an approving smile. The Dear

Friend, too, who until now had taken no part in the proceedings of the meeting, added his voice in agreement.

As the Chinese delegates went down to the river, Whitehead remained standing in the portal of the ancestral hall to watch the spectacle from there. A big, flat boat lay moored to the bank. As the group came down, the crowd collected.

'The honored guests who have come from afar wish to propitiate the God of the Waters,' the people explained to one another.

The Great Elder Brother was the first to jump into the boat, while Tien Nei-hung and the High Priest followed hesitatingly. The two comrades of the leader of West China were the last to go aboard, pushing the boat off from the bank with their feet. They poled and sculled to the middle of the river and there, in a spot where the current was less strong, they threw out the anchor.

'Tien Hsien-shêng, pray to the God of the Waters — and you, High Priest, assist him,' ordered the Great Elder Brother.

Both of them knelt down on the flat prow and murmured prayers. As the crowd watched, fascinatedly, a small, dense cloud floated over and darkened with its deep shadow a limited section of the stream where the boat lay, making it look almost as if the waters had turned an inky black. Seeing this, the Great Elder Brother shouted:

'You are scoundrels! The God of the Waters has pronounced it. It is you who have sinned against him!' With a resistless speed he and his comrades seized Tien Nei-hung and hurled him into the

water. The High Priest, who defended himself desperately for a moment, went the way of the other. They watched for a time the rushing current where the two had disappeared, but the river did not deliver up its victims. Slowly the water assumed once more its brownish hue, as the shadow of the cloud traveled on.

'The King of the River has called for them both. They were wicked men who sinned against the people — against you — but their guilt is now atoned for!' announced the Great Elder Brother to the crowd, as the boat swung back to the bank. With superstitious shudders the people had watched the gruesome spectacle and with fear and respect now opened a lane for this common soldier and his two companions.

'Great Elder Brother, the gods love you!' The Yellow Panther paid him this homage so that all the crowd could hear it. 'Lead the people! Take up the responsibility of directing them.'

The Dear Friend, too, bowed before the plain man and spoke feelingly:

'South China will love you as I do. When the element of fire rages too fiercely, it must be extinguished. You have done this. The spirit of the Great One will be with you, Elder Brother.'

'The responsibility is heavy; but, as you lay it upon me, I shall carry it. May Heaven show me the way.'

Returning to the hill with the others, he was soon to perceive that the responsibility he had been charged with was indeed serious. A mounted soldier of the Yellow Panther came riding at full

speed round the slope on which stood the ancestral hall and reported breathlessly:

'Li Hang-po sent me. There has been an outburst in the village of Wang Chia T'un. Foreigners are in danger. The two Russians have been made prisoners. Help must be sent at once.'

Pressed for details, he continued:

'I do not know anything more. Li Hang-po ordered me to accompany him, when he and Mr. Brooke rode off to search for some friends. Half an hour ago, when you went down to the river, they started. As we arrived at the village of Wang Chia T'un, we saw a great crowd of people gathered before a house on the square opposite the Temple of the God of War. The crowd so far had been quiet, except that now and then cries of "Kill the foreign devils" were heard. Then Li Hang-po ordered me at once to ride back and report, while he and Mr. Brooke started through the crowd toward those who were in the house.'

Whitehead was dumfounded at the news. In the excitement of the last events, he had not noticed Brooke's departure. Supposing that he had gone to the river bank, he thought nothing of his subaltern's absence. Nor had he, in the extraordinary turn affairs had taken, given a thought to the non-appearance of Dr. Ma and the Russians. Now he was one of the first to be spurred into action.

'Go catch my chair, chop-chop,' he roared to Lai-fu, 'and hurry, damn it, hurry! Master Brooke is in danger.' Angrily he stamped around the entrance hall, cursing his inability to ride, as

the Yellow Panther and the Elder Brother leaped on their horses and galloped off in the direction of the village. They would be there long before him, he reasoned, but there was no help for it.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRIUMPH OF TAIAN

BROOKE had taken advantage of the confusion which surrounded the capture of Tien Nei-hung and the priest to slip away from Whitehead unobserved. Happy as he was at the reunion with his chief, his first thought was of Alexandra. A month of enforced captivity with the Yellow Panther, pleasant as it had been from the point of view of creature comforts, was maddening when he knew that the only woman he had ever loved might be going into fresh danger. And now, he reflected, as he strode rapidly into the ancestral hall, it was all over. Old General Han and the Elder Brother would restore peace, and Alexandra, given visual evidence that she had failed, would have no further duty to keep her from him.

Eagerly he hurried from room to room of the hall, searching for the quarters of the revolutionaries. A servant directed him, but there was no response to his rappings at the doors. Hurriedly he retraced his steps. In one of the courts he met Li Hang-po.

'You are searching for Miss Goluboff?' inquired the young Chinese. 'A servant has just informed me that Dr. Ma has persuaded her and Michael Goluboff to seek shelter in the neighboring village. It appears that he feared for the girl's life if she remained, now that General Han has come.

She wanted to stay, but he finally persuaded her that it was for the good of the cause.'

'Damn the cause!' cried Brooke angrily. 'Which way did they go? General Han will do them no harm. We must bring them back.'

Li Hang-po hurried to find the servant who had told him of the girl's departure with her foster-father and Dr. Ma, while Brooke waited impatiently. He returned gravely to report:

'He says that they have gone in the direction of Wang Chia T'un. It is madness for them to have ventured out into the country with the people inflamed as they are.'

Brooke's anguished thoughts, turned aside from eager anticipation of a reunion with Alexandra, were immediately translated into action.

'Arrange for horses, and bring a soldier with you. We may want him if there is trouble.'

A few moments later, with one of the Yellow Panther's men riding behind, they set out in the direction of Wang Chia T'un. Neither spoke — the American too deep in his own thoughts, Li Hang-po considerate of his friend's feelings. The three of them were urging their horses to the utmost, Brooke plying his whip on the beast's flank in his anxiety to let no precious moment be lost. Eyes straight on the road in front of him, he gave no thought to the hostile glances which were cast in his direction by the harassed peasants whom they passed on the way.

Half an hour's time brought them to their objective. Clattering into the outskirts of the village, they found the streets deserted, not a sign of

life in the clustered houses. But from a square farther in the town the threatening murmur of a crowd rolled back to them. Li Hang-po rode on ahead to discover the reason for the tumult. When he returned, grave apprehension was in his face, as he explained hastily:

'The Russians and Ma are over there in a house and are being besieged by the populace, for they have behaved in an uncommonly foolish way. While a theatrical performance was being given in front of the Temple of Kuan Ti, in honor of a newly found deity, the three of them passed close to the stage and thus made the people furious. The villagers say that the relations with the god have been disturbed by the intervening foreigners and that the offenders must be killed to restore the good temper of the new deity. While we hurry to protect them, the soldier can ride back to tell General Han what has happened and to ask his immediate aid.'

Though Li Hang-po's face was a mask of inscrutability, Brooke saw that he was not making light of the danger and felt his fear for Alexandra's safety mounting. The soldier was hardly dispatched before Brooke grasped his friend's arm.

'She . . . Miss Goluboff is there?'

The Chinese nodded.

'She has taken refuge with the others in a house on the square. If we hurry . . .' and the unfinished sentence, which trailed off as he swung his horse and rode toward the crowd, added to the fear in the American's heart. With his knowledge of the Chinese psychology Brooke realized that, if the

foreigners were held to have offended the god, they would be made to pay the penalty. He knew the people well and was quick to see that only flight could save the transgressors.

The crowd gave way grudgingly before Li Hang-po's most polite '*Chieh kuang!*' to allow the pair to pass through in silence. From the glowering looks that were turned on them and from the murmuring on all sides, Brooke realized the deadly seriousness of these simple folk, who felt that their religion had been outraged. The murmur had swelled to a roar by the time they reached the compound and looked around for some one to hold their horses. As the gate was suddenly opened to allow them to dash through it, it was no more than barred before stones struck the house, followed by a hail of missiles, great and small, from the angry crowd.

But Brooke hardly noticed the pelting stones. In contrast to the storm that was breaking around him, he was inwardly at peace for the first time since that day on the Fu when he had come upon the wrecked house-boat at the curve in the river. His throat closed as he took the gratefully extended hand of the Russian girl and looked for a moment deep into her eyes, for there he found that for which he had been searching. There was more than gratitude within their dark mystery, more than happiness at having found a friend. Love lingered in their emotional depths, and Brooke knew that this time it had come to take possession. Death might be their rescuer from this last adventure; but, at the moment, he hardly cared. He

was at peace with himself and Alexandra. Then he heard her voice, so low that he only just caught the words.

'You always come when I am in danger,' was what she said, and his answer was a simple 'Yes.' But in that brief instant, in those words, he had, as it were, held her in his arms and felt the surge of her love for him; and he knew that she felt it, too. From this moment of ecstasy Dr. Ma recalled them to the rude reality of the surroundings.

'A pretty fix,' he was saying to Li Hang-po. 'Those men are fools. We did not know what the performance in front of the temple signified and only learned it afterwards.'

'What *has* happened?' asked Brooke.

'A small golden snake with red spots on its head has been found in the village, coiled in the lap of a boy, who was asleep under a tree. The stupid country people look upon this snake as a powerful god; they even think it is the King of the Yellow River. They believe that the fearful flood which has done so much damage has happened solely because the angered god left his realm and is just now returning in this form. It is necessary to propitiate him by theatrical performances. They also consider it a special omen for the boy in whose lap the snake was found that the god has chosen *him* to return to after so much misfortune.'

Brooke realized the significance of it all and answered quickly:

'Well, we are all in a pretty muddle. Listen to them outside.'

From the square in front of the temple screams were heard:

'Kill the foreign devils! Crush the South China frog!'

Another rain of stones and other missiles sounded against the doors and walls. Fresh recruits joined the crowd, apparently newcomers from the neighboring villages who wished to be present at the holy play, which had meanwhile begun again.

'What are we to do?' asked Ma helplessly, his petulance with the stupidity of the villagers overcome by the gravity of the situation.

'The Great Elder Brother and General Han will soon be here. Till then it is our obvious duty to lie low and keep quiet,' counseled Brooke.

'Obvious duty! That's the way you look upon it from your viewpoint of the timid bourgeois?'

In the emotion of the last moments, Brooke had not noticed Michael Goluboff, who now stepped from the shadow of a corner. Since the American had seen him last, a great change had come over the man. His eyes, which were formerly so dull and dead, were now glowing with a passionate fire; the muscles of his face and his whole body were tense.

'You fool,' he said to Brooke, 'you white-livered fool! You must speak to the people and drive their superstition from them.'

There was a pause during which the old man stood before Brooke quivering with excitement.

'Coward!' he spat out suddenly. 'Michael Goluboff has never been afraid of any man!'

Before any one in the room could stop him, he

darted to the door, threw it open, unbarred the gate and rushed into the street, while the watchers stood aghast. The besieging crowd drew back a bit, yelling savagely as they saw the wild old man coming down upon them. As he stormed forward, they parted and let him through to the stage, upon which he tried to climb.

'They are killing him!' cried Alexandra, as she watched the crowd suddenly surge forward and drag the old man down.

'Kill him! Kill the foreign devil!' came the shouts from the street.

Brooke drew the girl to him without saying a word, knowing well that the man had invited death by going into that maddened crowd. The girl rested there for a moment, limp and grateful for the shield that had been thrown about her.

Brooke looked up to see Dr. Ma walking toward the door.

'Here, Ma,' he called sharply. 'Where are you going?'

The Chinese turned. There was a queer light in his eyes which Brooke failed to understand; but the girl, looking up from Brooke's shoulder, saw and comprehended.

'There is a slight chance,' said the Chinese slowly, his precise English impressing itself upon the American as never before, 'that if I speak to the people, it will quiet them. It is a chance, but. . .'

He bowed with dignity, squared his shoulders and stepped out. From the house, the remaining three watched with fascinated fear. As the

Chinese appeared, all the people were pushing toward the stage. Calmly and with head erect, he started across the open space toward the edge of the mob. Suddenly they spied him and threw an engulfing ring around him. In another second he was submerged, as Michael Goluboff had been, in the surging, boiling sea of angry humanity.

Brooke felt himself overcome by the tragedy and the horror of the moment.

'A hero,' he said, half to himself. 'I didn't think Ma had it in him.'

He turned to find the girl staring fixedly through the window. Crossing to her, he drew her to him and felt her body shake with sobs. Affected by her deep emotion, he said softly:

'Even in China they do such things for love.'

After a moment Li Hang-po, who had been out to bar the gate, spoke from a respectful distance.

'We cannot remain here. Listen to the mob.'

The blood-lust of the crowd had been whetted by the murder of Goluboff and Dr. Ma, and now they were just turning to renew their assault on the house. As Brooke and Alexandra awoke again to the imminent danger of their own situation, Li Hang-po explained:

'I have found a side door which leads across a lane to the Temple of Kuan Ti. We must seek sanctuary there.'

Brooke looked fondly at the girl who had suddenly come to mean so much to him. There was an expression in her face which even the events of the past hour and the seriousness of their present position could not overshadow.

'I am ready, dear,' was all she said.

Hand in hand they slipped into the alley, guided by Li Hang-po. Finding the crowd had drawn every one out of the narrow passage, they hurried across it and into the temple. Nor was it a moment too soon; for, just as they barred the door behind them, they heard shouts which told them that some outpost of the crowd had seen their escape. In the uproar they could hear the cries of rage as the people realized their would-be victims had sought safety in the temple.

Then the wave of tumult subsided into a fleeting trough of silence, so that the fugitives had an undisturbed moment to glance about their sanctuary. The temple was small, and in the center stood a huge statue of Kuan Ti, the God of War, with one hand pointing toward the sky.

Gradually the cries swelled up again and were accompanied by a shower of missiles, some of which broke through the roof of the badly kept little building.

'The people look upon the idols as sacred only during their worship of them,' Li Hang-po explained, 'for they think that only at such times do the spirits of the gods reside within them. Therefore, they will dare to threaten us here, also.'

Alexandra shivered and drew closer to Brooke.

'If nothing else avails,' Li Hang-po continued, 'we shall have to go out there.'

As he spoke, he pointed to an open porch at the front of the temple and just opposite the stage in the square, where stood a tripod supporting a shallow porcelain basin in which a small golden

serpent was resting. 'That is the new god to whom the crowd is paying homage. If we place ourselves right next to him, we shall probably be safe; but this would mean unheard-of daring and would invite terrible revenge, if the crowd should break.'

The rain of stones continued, coming now from all sides. In order to prevent any chance of the foreign devils' escape, the crowd had evidently surrounded the temple.

Brooke pointed to the porch and asked of Li Hang-po:

'Do you think we had better try it? They may break in here at any minute.'

The Chinese nodded, as the crowd was becoming more and more violent. Suddenly there was a hammering against the side door through which they had entered.

'We have no other chance,' said Li Hang-po, as he started to lead the way to the porch.

'Wait!' commanded Brooke, grasping his friend's arm.

There was a trampling of horses' hoofs in the square, and a voice was heard crying out:

'What is the matter? Why all this disorder?'

'The Great Elder Brother!' called Li Hang-po to his companions in the first excitement he had really shown. '*Ta Lao Hsiung! Ta Lao Hsiung!*' he shouted; and, turning back, added; 'Now we are saved!'

It was a tense moment as they went forward and watched the Great Elder Brother haranguing the crowd.

'Do not make trouble. A persecution of foreigners? That does you no honor! Do you want to give me face? Then be quiet and wait. Your elders will tell me your complaints and wishes, and then we shall see what should be done. Here, Younger Brother, please take our horses and walk them up and down.'

The Great Elder Brother, in his worn uniform of a common soldier, stalked up the steps of the main entrance. The Yellow Panther and the Dear Friend were with him, without escort and all quite unarmed. As the three of them had made the distance between the ancestral hall and the village in record time, they were covered with dust, and the stern old Yellow Panther showed traces of his hard ride in the disorder of his dress, usually so immaculate and so carefully arranged.

'This is a fearful business,' said the Great Elder Brother, when he had heard the story of Li Hang-po. 'The Russian and the delegate from Shanghai have paid with their lives for their folly; and it's not over yet,' he added quickly. 'The people have suffered terribly and are ripe for revolt. Something must be done.'

'But they won't dare to disobey you,' said Brooke.

'Won't they?' repeated the Great Elder Brother. 'Listen.'

As he spoke, the rumble of the crowd, which had died down at the advent of the distinguished trio, began anew. More had gathered from the surrounding villages to see the miracle of the King of the River. Outside a sea of men surged back

and forth, filling now not only the temple square, but all streets that debouched into it.

There was a sudden movement in front of the temple, and the crowd parted to allow several men, who turned out to be the elders of the village, to pass through. Respectfully greeting the Great Elder Brother, they told him what had happened, giving substantially the same report that Dr. Ma had rendered to Brooke and to Li Hang-po, after which they truthfully described the death of the two who had left the house.

'Great Elder Brother,' said one of them, 'you may have us beheaded because this has happened here where we are responsible for good order, but we could not prevent it. Listen to the people outside even now! They are demanding that the god who has returned to us shall be properly honored and this sacrilege expiated.'

'Then go out and tell the crowd that the performance is to be continued in order to give pleasure to the God of the River,' commanded the Elder Brother.

When this intelligence was passed on to them, the murmuring stopped for a moment, only to begin once more, louder and more threatening.

The guarantors of the people returned.

'The crowd is not contented,' said their spokesman. 'The people say — you must excuse us if we tell you frankly — that you do not honor the gods, that you are modern and mix with foreigners. They all believe that a great miracle has been worked here which will restore peace and happiness to the country. They demand that the Gov-

ernment shall acknowledge the miracle and proclaim it far and wide.'

The Great Elder Brother was silent for a moment. He looked at the Yellow Panther and the Dear Friend, but both motioned to him to carry on the negotiations himself.

'Tell your people,' he said finally, 'that a temple shall be built here in this village to the God of the River; that I shall have the deity carried to the capital in solemn procession; and that the miracle shall be announced by a decree to the whole country, so that the people may know whom they have to honor.'

As the leaders again went out to the crowd, the Great Elder Brother turned to his companions. His forehead was covered with perspiration, which he wiped from it with a dirty blouse-sleeve.

'I can only tell you,' he said gravely, 'what you must already see for yourselves. We are in the greatest danger. Not even the hold our names have on the people will save us unless something happens to appease their wrath. I have stopped them for a moment; but they will return, and their requests will be more difficult. Is there any way of escape left open?'

'The mob entirely surrounds the temple,' announced Li Hang-po solemnly.

'Then it is our wits against theirs,' said the Great Elder Brother grimly, 'our wits — or a miracle. Does any one else want to parley with them?'

'You understand their ways here better than we,' said the Yellow Panther. 'We place ourselves entirely in your hands.'

The tumult had begun again outside; and, while the greatest respect was still apparent in the manner of the elders as they entered the temple for the third time, their faces showed a determination that indicated clearly the seriousness of the situation.

'You are a pious man, *Ta Lao Hsiung*,' said their leader. 'The people believe it now. It shall be done with the god as you say. But the great King of the River has appeared in a significant manner. The boy, chosen by the deity as his companion, has surely been designated for something unusual. The people demand that you acknowledge this too and that you take the necessary steps.'

'Very well,' assented the Great Elder Brother. 'What is his name, and from what sort of people does he come?'

'His family name is Wang (King), and his descent is blameless,' replied the elder. 'One of his ancestors was a *Hanlin* under the Emperor K'ang Hsi. The family is now, however, poor, for the father is a simple peasant. The mother also comes of a good house.'

'Bring the boy here,' commanded the Elder Brother.

The threatening murmur died entirely, as the elders appeared in the crowd. The Great Elder Brother wanted the boy to be brought to him, and he would know how to honor him. The people waited expectantly.

Presently the elders returned, leading a pleasant-faced lad of five, chubby and barefooted. His only

clothes consisted of blue linen trousers and a little waistcoat, trimmed with cord. His eyes were bright and clever as he gazed at the unusual gathering in the temple, which was his playground.

The Great Elder Brother scratched his head as he gravely contemplated the boy. Brooke and Alexandra, hand in hand, stood in the background, watching the strange drama being played before their eyes, while the Yellow Panther and the Dear Friend were deep in thought.

'Look . . . look at Kuan Ti!' suddenly shouted the Yellow Panther.

All eyes were turned to the figure of the god. Slowly the arm which had pointed toward Heaven was lowered. When it came to rest, the finger of the God of War pointed straight at the boy! For a moment, the little group stood transfixed, until the Yellow Panther broke the spell.

'Whenever the God of War reveals himself, it is to indicate a new dynasty. Look, he does so now!'

Without a moment's hesitation, this man of power, known as the imperial general, prostrated himself on the ground and made the kowtow of the Emperors before the boy.

The Great Elder Brother moved more slowly.

'You may be right, Yellow Panther. The God of the Yellow River, the artery of our country's life, has marked the boy, and Kuan Ti has spoken before our eyes. The people wish to have a visible head who can intercede for them to Heaven. What say you, friends, shall we hesitate?'

But the Dear Friend quickly interrupted, seeking to delay a decision.

'You must wait. Remember, the Great One directs our concerted movement. We owe all our successes to him, and nothing should happen which might displease him. Do not invite his curse.'

Even as he spoke, there was a movement in the now-subsided crowd, and the leader of Whitehead's escort hurried up the temple steps.

'His Excellency is on the way,' he announced, to the delight of Brooke, 'and he has directed me to ride ahead with this message.'

With this he handed an envelope to the Great Elder Brother, who tore it open and read:

'The Great One has fulfilled his mission. His spirit has made the journey in the Dragon Chariot.'

There was a devout silence, for Death had spread its shadow over the little group. The momentary stillness was suddenly broken by some one falling. It was the Dear Friend, who, in spite of the efforts to revive him, lay rigid on the ground. Brooke finally felt his pulse and heart and announced, with the spell of China's mystery upon him:

'The Great One has spoken. He is dead!'

Shocked by the suddenness of the man's passing, the little gathering, which had gone through so much that day, seemed thoroughly dazed and able to do nothing but stand about in staring inactivity. Even the crowd was awed and still as though by some unphrased command. Unconsciously the others seemed all to be waiting for the Yellow Panther to make the first move or sugges-

tion, and it was he who finally broke the silence:

'Yes, the Great One has spoken,' said the old man gravely, 'by taking his Dear Friend to him, his work being completed. He knows that China will be happy when she returns to the original Chinese national ideas; and peace will return to her when she has once more a firm apex, a ruler. You, Great Elder Brother, who have set up a realm of universal fraternity, have been shown the Son of Heaven who is to be your master. The Gods have revealed to you an Emperor. Follow him!'

The plain soldier made no answer except to prostrate himself before the boy as his Emperor; while Brooke and Alexandra, swept away by the intensity of the moment, found themselves bowing and gazing in bewilderment at the chubby, round-faced lad.

There was a buzz of suppressed excitement from outside. The crowd had heard from the elders of the deeply significant miracle and knew that once more a Son of Heaven was raised to rule over them and to sacrifice for them at the altar of Heaven.

Two sedan-chairs of the old imperial time were brought, and in them the Emperor and the god were placed, to be borne out in solemn procession to the river bank for the blessing and appeasing of the waters, before they should be started on their long journey to the capital.

Brooke and Alexandra remained behind as the procession left the temple. The excitement and strain of the last hour or two had gripped them with such tenseness that, when all this was sud-

denly lifted, they dropped down exhausted on the little platform at the feet of Kuan Ti. A sob shook the frame of the girl, and in a moment Brooke's arms were about her, holding her close. In the last hours she had lost unspeakably much — an adopted father, a faithful fellow worker, and the final vestige of hope in her mission. No wonder that it should carry her near the breaking-point, thought Brooke, as he smoothed back the glorious waves of hair which swept her forehead.

'I am sorry for you, Alexandra, inexpressibly sorry; for you have lost so much.'

'Lost?' she whispered; and, as her face was raised, Brooke thrilled when he saw that through her tears a new radiance was shining. 'I have found myself — and you.'

It may have been seconds, it may have been minutes, when Brooke raised his face from hers with the feeling that some one was looking on. He laughed a merry, care-free laugh, the first in months, as he drew Alexandra's attention to the broad, humorous back of his chief, who was sitting on the stone steps before the pavilion, gazing out across the now deserted square and unconcernedly smoking a cigar.

'Don't hurry on my account,' called Whitehead without looking round. 'I've all the time in the world.'

As he finished speaking, the two were but a step behind him. He rose and looked for a long minute at the girl. Then he took her hands in his, kissed her on both cheeks, and, with a mock gesture of despair, gave up the fight of a lifetime with the words:

'I surrender, too.'

To which Alexandra responded with something akin to mischievous triumph, though there must have been a world of tragedy buried beneath her phrase:

'Then TAIAN has come at last!'

THE END

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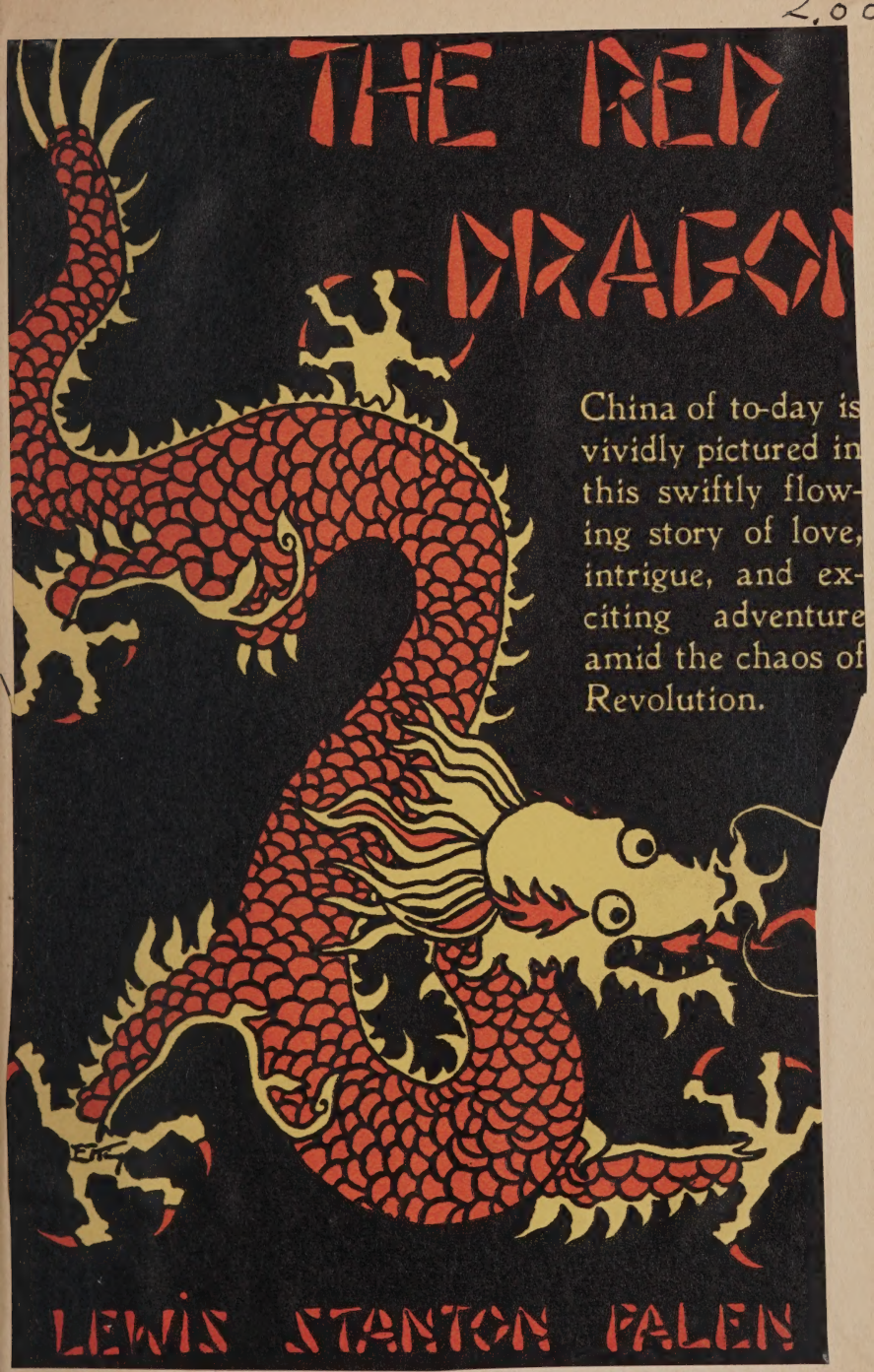
THE RED DRAGON



China of to-day is vividly pictured in this swiftly flowing story of love, intrigue, and exciting adventure amid the chaos of Revolution.

LEWIS STANTON FALEN

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

harbors an inborn urge for new scenes, new people, and fresh possibilities. After graduating from Cornell University, he went to China during the Boxer Rebellion and took up residence in the temple of the Empress of Heaven in Antung. For a quarter of a century he has kept a finger on the pulse of the Chinese Giant and few Americans have probed more deftly to the throbbing heart of Asia.

In 1921 Mr. Palen met Ferdinand Ossendowski and collaborated with him in writing 'Beasts, Men and Gods' and other hair-raising tales of the latter's thrilling escape from the Bolsheviki. In 'The White Devil of the Black Sea' and 'The White Devil's Mate,' Mr. Palen gave two more astonishing stories to the world and followed them with 'The Lost Sword of Shamyl,' an account of the earlier life of the White Devil, and 'The Red Dragon,' a novel of China in Revolution. He spends his winters on the Riviera and his summers in Switzerland with a typewriter near at hand.